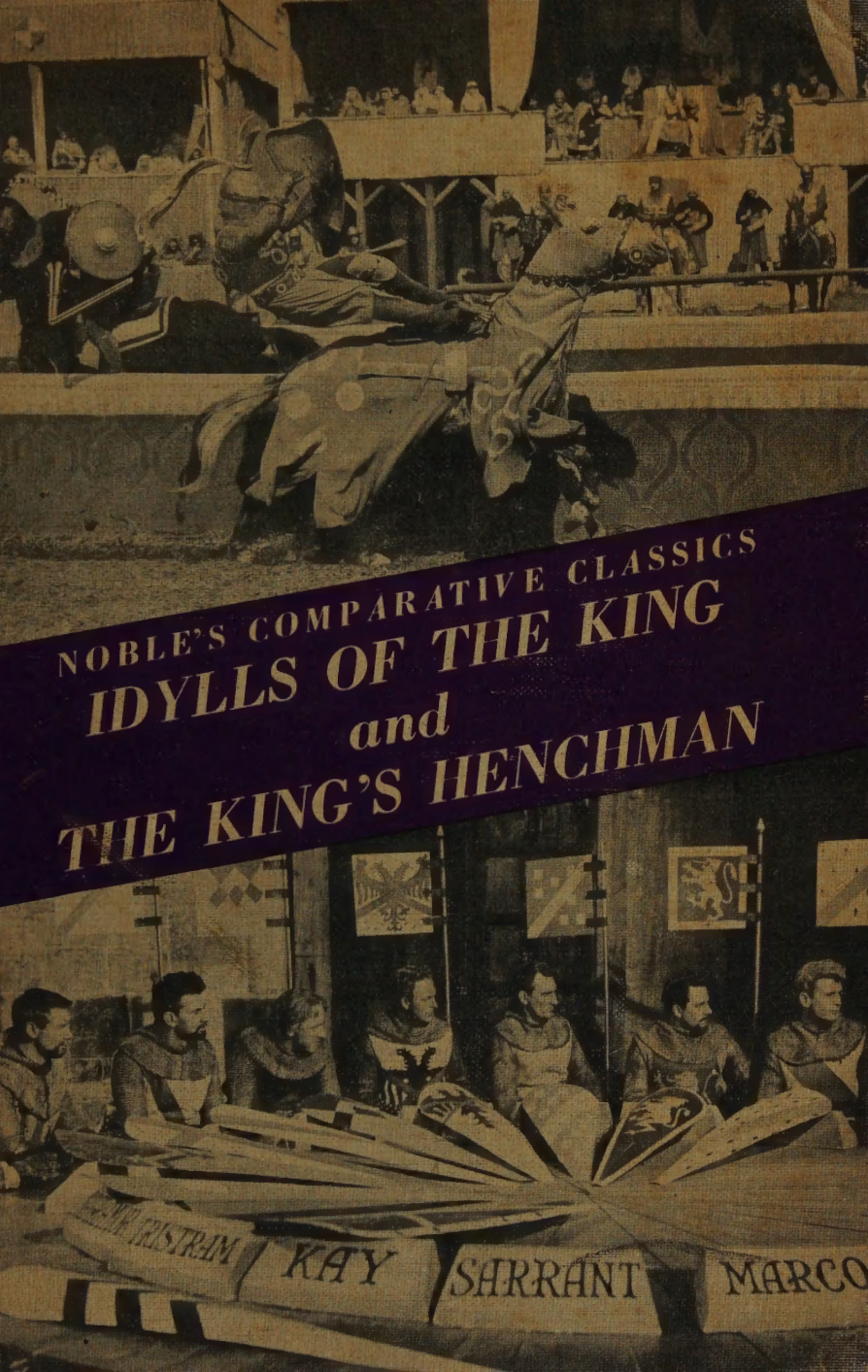

NOBLE'S COMPARATIVE CLASSICS
IDYLLS OF THE KING
and
THE KING'S HENCHMAN
TRISTRAM
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Mrs. Dyson

NOBLE'S COMPARATIVE CLASSICS

Idylls of the King

and

The King's Henchman

NOBLE'S COMPARATIVE CLASSICS

Idylls of the King

BY ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

The Coming of Arthur • Gareth and Lynette
Lancelot and Elaine • The Holy Grail
Guinevere • The Passing of Arthur



NOBLE AND NOBLE : PUBLISHERS : NEW YORK

TALES OF CHIVALRY AND ROMANCE

The King's Henchman

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY



Edited by EDITH M. WARD
and EDWARD G. BERNARD, M.A.

With Decorations by GEORGE M. RICHARDS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The King's Henchman, originally published by Harper & Brothers and copyrighted, 1927, by Edna St. Vincent Millay, is used in this book by special permission

The Holy Grail and *The King's Henchman* have purposely been shortened for use in this edition.

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8-3-8-57

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PRINTED AND BOUND IN THE U.S.A.

Dedicated to all who

". . . *ride abroad redressing*

human wrongs . . ."

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Preface

LITTLE justification need be offered for bringing together, as one of the Comparative Classics Series, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and Edna St. Vincent Millay's *The King's Henchman*. Both stories have had popular success. *The Idylls* has gone through countless editions; *The King's Henchman* has been an operatic favorite for several years. Both poets are outstanding. Tennyson was Poet Laureate of England and is recognized as one of the greatest lyrists in our tongue. Miss Millay is acknowledged as one of our foremost American poets.

But it is not simply the outstanding character of the individual poet and of each work that occasioned this edition. It is the happy chance that both writers should have gone back to Anglo-Saxon days for their themes and used plots strikingly similar.

The reader threading through the peculiar beauties of the one poem finds them intensified by recollection of theme and story of the other. It is upon the recognition of this psychological principle that delight and educational value are drawn from the interplay of reading memories that the Comparative Classics Series was originally based.

No effort in the various study helps has been made to force parallelisms. Rather it has been the purpose to spin from a common center a broadening web, so that a multi-faceted pattern may emerge, one in which each variation and contrast may serve to intensify understanding of the basic ideas.

The three themes common to the two works—chivalry, love and social re-construction—are of significant value and appeal to the adolescent.

It is suggested that both classics be read first solely for the story. That is the mainspring of interest for the young.

It is only after action has clarified character that a study of human motives becomes meaningful. And it is only after unconscious familiarity with the poet's phrase has been set through frequent readings that poetry may profitably be approached as such. To the teacher, therefore, be it said: Seek the story first. Bear lightly at the beginning upon detailed explanation and upon appreciation. Let the tale carry itself. Once it has been seen as a whole, understanding of deeper issues and delight in beauty will come more readily.

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Suggested Reading

Atkins, Elizabeth	*Edna St. Vincent Millay*
Brooke, Stopford	*Tennyson, His Art and Relation to Modern Life*
Jones, Richard	*The Growth of the "Idylls of the King"*
Lang, Andrew	*Tennyson*
Rhys, John	*Studies in the Arthurian Legend*
Saintsbury, G. E.	*Corrected Impressions*
Strachey, Edward	*Malory's "Morte D'Arthur"*
Tennyson, Hallam	*Alfred, Lord Tennyson, A Memoir*

Part I

INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

An Open Letter to Students

WHATEVER your taste in reading, a stirring tale told in swinging rhythm ought to appeal to you. The two classics in this book are just that.

Each offers excitement, romance, suspense. Each tells a good story. And, that it tells it in poetic form can add to your pleasure if you learn the trick of reading poetry. Before there was any prose literature among any of the peoples of the world, there was poetry. All poetry originally was meant to be sung or chanted. In fact the oldest news agency in the world was probably the ballad sung by the wandering poet who wove into his story all the happenings of the countryside through which he had traveled. To sing of them rather than merely to converse about them added color, touched up the picture, reached his paunch-full or drowsy hearers more immediately because they themselves began to sway with the rhythm, to take up the refrain, to become, in fact, collaborators in the story.

Poetry can do this for you today; it matters not how modern you are. Poetry helps you to *share* the experience because it takes two to make poetry: the poet and the listener.

What the listener has to do is to lend himself to the rhythm, feel it in his blood and bones and it will carry him along to increased enjoyment of the story. That means that poetry must be read with the ear, not only the eye. It is always best if read aloud. If at first you stumble because you do not know the meaning of a word, or because a construction confuses you, catch the rhythm, say the lines aloud two or three times, and you will be surprised to find how the thought suddenly is clear.

Come to poetry with an open mind, and it will reward you. Poetry is not "just for girls." Men—far more than

women—have been the poets. But both men and women, boys and girls, have enjoyed it. They have loved, not only the story told, but the poetry itself.

There's the delight to be found in rhythm. Poetry has the swing and pulse of music. And the words of poems often sing themselves. You will find this particularly true in *The Idylls* and in *The King's Henchman*. Read these aloud:

> *"Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May;*
> *Blow trumpet, the long night hath rolled away!"*

> *"What art thou, that hither from thy hollow hill*
> *art come*
> *To work me woe?"*

Can you recall other singing lines from poetry that you know?

Besides delight in the music, there is joy to be found in following the poet's imagination. With an unusual comparison or a fresh insight into the essential character of an experience, he can set an overpowering mood or suddenly light up the everyday with new significance. Consider the unearthly sadness of Tennyson's lines:

> *"An agony*
> *Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills*
> *All night in a waste land, where no one comes,*
> *Or hath come, since the making of the world."*

Note the sharply revealing comparison by which Miss Millay makes us understand the baseness of disloyalty:

> *"My mind, that hath been fed so long on the sweet*
> *fare of utter trust in thee,*
> *Smells at this meat,*
> *And turns away."*

Do you recall examples from your own experience with poetry?

Read the two classics in this book for pleasure first of all. Feel the sound of them, enjoy the story.

Then when you know them well, think about the people in them. You will find—under the shining armor and bright trappings of the Middle Ages—people just like yourself. People who work hard, love, let others down, are carried to success by a bold hope, or defeated because the evil in the world is too much for them. They may even help you to understand yourself better, help you to recognize that your life, too, is a story, and one that you have the shaping of.

Take this book; it is yours to enjoy. If you have half the fun reading it that the editors had in doing it, you will have a good time, indeed.

EMW
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Biographical Notes

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

WHEN Alfred Tennyson was a young boy, his grandfather paid him ten shillings to write an elegy on his grandmother who had just died. As he handed the money over, Alfred's grandfather said, "There, that is the first money you have ever earned by your poetry, and, take my word for it, it will be the last." Certainly this was not much encouragement for the boy who was to become poet laureate of England and the greatest poet of his time!

As a matter of fact, Alfred Tennyson wrote his first poetry at the age when most of us are in the first grades of grammar school. Before he was fourteen, he had composed an epic of 6,000 lines.

Born in 1809, the same year as Lincoln, Poe, and Darwin, he was one of twelve children of a village clergyman. With his eight brothers, Alfred played great games like Arthur's knights, holding fierce jousts and tournaments. All of them also made up long serial stories. When dinner time came and they all sat around the table, each would in turn put a chapter of his story underneath the potato bowl. In Somersby, Lincolnshire, where Alfred was born and spent his boyhood, there were fewer than a hundred people; it was "a land of quiet villages, large fields, gray hillsides and noble, tall-towered churches," rich in the pastoral loveliness of the English countryside.

With his brother Charles who was about a year older, Alfred wrote a collection of one hundred and two poems which was published in 1827 and for which they received £20. Its title was *Poems by Two Brothers.* As the motto for this collection, the authors chose a quotation from the Latin poet Martial which read: "We ourselves know that these are nothing." The poems are interesting chiefly as reflecting the

brothers' splendid knowledge of history and literature. A year later both brothers entered the great Cambridge University where Alfred soon won a prize for a poem, entitled *Timbuctoo.*

Tall, powerfully built, dark-haired, with bright laughing hazel eyes, Alfred Tennyson was the sort of man who instantly captured attention and liking. Although he was somewhat shy and solitary, he soon made several excellent friends among the most brilliant students at Cambridge. Most intimate of these was Arthur Henry Hallam, to whom Tennyson became so attached as to think of him as his other self. Hallam was not only Tennyson's best friend but the sweetheart of his sister Emily. Together the two boys traveled through Europe in 1830. They planned other trips but were prevented from taking them together by the illness and death of Tennyson's father the following year. For this reason Alfred had to leave college and return home where he remained for six years.

During the next two years, Tennyson suffered two grievous blows. The first was a smashing criticism, by a noted professor, of the collection called *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical,* which the young poet had published in 1830. The second and vastly more serious shock was Hallam's sudden death of apoplexy in Vienna in 1833. Tennyson's grief at the passing of his friend lasted the remainder of his life. *In Memoriam,* one of the finest elegies in the English language, was begun immediately but was not completed and published until 1850.

In 1832, Tennyson had brought out another small book of poems which greatly surpassed that of 1830. It contained *The Lady of Shalott, The Lotos Eaters, The Palace of Art,* and other poems of enduring fame. Then for the next ten years Tennyson published almost nothing, spending his time in solitude and serious work at writing. He had already fallen

in love with Emily Sellwood, but his lack of money prevented their marriage before 1850.

The recognition of Tennyson as the greatest English poet of his time dates from 1842 when he published a superlatively fine collection of poems which included *Morte D'-Arthur, Locksley Hall, Ulysses,* and *Saint Agnes.* In 1845, the British Government awarded him a pension of two hundred pounds a year. Two years later, Tennyson published *The Princess,* a fanciful, half-humorous tale of suffragettes, containing several beautiful lyrics. The climax of his career arrived in 1850. In that year, *In Memoriam* appeared, Tennyson was married, and he was made poet laureate, succeeding the great Wordsworth.

Thereafter, the income from Tennyson's writing was ample enough to support his family. In 1853, he purchased a house at Farringford on the Isle of Wight. There he spent the remaining forty years of his life in studious peace and solitude, happy in the companionship of his wife and two children as well as his many friends. Among these were the Carlyles, the Brownings, Thackeray, Dickens, and Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria. In 1884, after having twice refused, he accepted a baronetcy from Queen Victoria as a tribute to his profession. That is why he is generally known now as Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

In 1864, *Enoch Arden* was published. *Crossing the Bar,* which was written in 1889, is Tennyson's famous lyric on death. It was the poet's desire to have this poem printed last in every edition of his works.

Early in the morning of October 6, 1892, lying in the still moonlight that flooded his room, Tennyson quietly passed away.

The Arthurian Legends and Allegory

DID King Arthur really live? No scholar can be sure but many believe that there was such a Celtic king. He is supposed to have fought many great battles against the invading Saxon heathen, perhaps in the sixth or seventh century. In any case, the stories of his victories were handed down by word of mouth for many centuries throughout England and France. During this time, the tradition grew, and to the primitive tales were added the flavor of knightly chivalry and the spirit and legends of Christianity. Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote down some of the stories as early as 1136. The first large collection, including the French romances, was made in 1485 by Sir Thomas Malory. His book, called *Morte D'Arthur,* and Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Welsh epic, the *Mabinogion,* were Tennyson's chief sources of story material for his *Idylls.*

Even as a boy, Tennyson had been much impressed by his reading of Malory's stories, devoting much of his play to Arthurian mock jousts and tournaments. He first published a poem based on this material in 1832, *The Lady of Shalott.*

The *Idylls* appeared separately in fragments and groups before they were finally assembled as a unified story. As one scholar has commented, Tennyson "began with the end, continued with the beginning, and ended with the middle of the story." In all, Tennyson wrote twelve idylls. These, with the dates of their first publication, are:

The Coming of Arthur	(1869)
Gareth and Lynette	(1872)
The Marriage of Geraint	(1859)
Geraint and Enid	(1859)
Balin and Balan	(1885)
Merlin and Vivien	(1859)
Lancelot and Elaine	(1859)

Pelleas and Ettarre	(1869)
The Last Tournament	(1872)
The Holy Grail	(1869)
Guinevere	(1859)
The Passing of Arthur	(1842, 1869)

Is there a hidden story in the *Idylls?* Many people find very complicated meanings in them. This came to be a bit of a game until Tennyson himself was driven to say, in protest, "They have taken my hobby and ridden it too hard, and have explained some things too allegorically, although there is an allegorical or perhaps a rather parabolic drift in the poem."

The central theme of the *Idylls* is Arthur's creation of a kingdom in which courage, honor, kindness, and nobility prevailed until all were destroyed by the blind and disloyal love of Guinevere and Lancelot. Reaching its climax of purity and happiness in the story of *Gareth and Lynette,* the court of Arthur begins, in *Geraint and Enid,* to lapse from its high ideals as a result of the rumors about the sinful Queen. In the tales of *Lancelot and Elaine* and *Guinevere* we see the downfall completed.

More than this, however, the poem is a story of the heroic struggle of the human soul against the weakness of the flesh and human character. Arthur is, of course, the human representative of the forces of moral progress, and Camelot is the visible result of his labors. In his work Arthur is aided by wisdom, faith, hope, charity, and other lofty spiritual qualities symbolized by Merlin and the three Queens.

The Verse Pattern

The Idylls

Written in blank verse, the *Idylls* are mostly in unrhymed iambic pentameter, each line consisting of five two-syllable feet, of which the second syllables are accented. The standard scanning is as follows:

Clear hon/or shin/ing like/ the dew/y star
Of dawn/ and faith/ in their/ great King/ with pure

On the other hand, Tennyson is noted as one of the greatest and most fluent masters of metrical structure in all English literature. This is reflected in the *Idylls* by his brilliant variations of the basic iambic pentameter to create many different rhythmic patterns, each designed to fit the mood of what is said. Most of the verses have five beats, but the differentiation occurs in the arrangement of accented and unaccented syllables in relation to one another.

Some examples of this are:

Shining/ in arms/, "Dam sel/, the quest/ is mine.
G L 727

Shock'd on/ the cen/tral bridge/, and eith/er spear
G L 939

Then from/ the smit/ten sur/face flash'd/, as it were,
L E 1228

Bare, as/ a wild/ wave in/ the wide/ North Sea,
L E 480

Fast with/ your fasts/, not feast/ing with/your feasts;
G 672

And the/ wild wa/ter lap/ping on/ the crag. P A 239

Biographical Notes

Edna St. Vincent Millay

AS soon as a book of poetry by Edna St. Vincent Millay appears, it is snapped up in large numbers by collectors of first editions. This is one sign that her writings are already considered classics. Thomas Hardy, the great English novelist, once remarked that there were two, and only two great things, in the United States—the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay and recessional buildings. Perhaps more than any other American poet of our time, Miss Millay possesses a pure and ecstatic lyrical gift comparable to that of Tennyson.

Born on February 22, 1892, in Rockland, Maine, she had a peaceful and happy childhood. The red-haired, green-eyed, adventurous little girl was called by her family and friends "Vincent." When she was eight, her parents moved to the coast town of Rockport where she spent many happy hours on the seashore. At an early age, she showed a remarkable fondness for Shakespeare and read all his plays before she was nine. Her first poetry was contributed to the *St. Nicholas Magazine* for children, in which she published much verse before she was fifteen.

It was not until four years later, in 1911, that Miss Millay first earned wide recognition as a leading writer. Her long poem, *Renascence,* written in that year, but not printed until 1917, is remarkable for its emotional surge and intuitive insight. Although it did not win the poetry prize for which it had been submitted, *Renascence* is now generally accepted as one of the most impressive and powerful poems of our time.

Soon afterward, the writer entered Vassar College, from which she was graduated in 1917. Her first volume, including *Renascence,* was published that year, winning widespread

praise. Miss Millay then supported herself by writing short stories, acting, and translating. During this period, she lived in that section of New York City known as Greenwich Village. She spent most of her time writing and acting for the Provincetown Players there.

In 1923, she married Eugen Jan Boissevain. Until her death in 1950, she lived on a farm in the Berkshires, devoting most of her time to writing and occasional lecture tours.

The successive volumes of her work show not only increase in the ripeness of her art, but a maturing growth in social consciousness. With her *Justice Denied in Massachusetts,* a bitter arraignment of the Commonwealth's handling of the famous Sacco-Vanzetti case, began her concern with the deeper issues of man's inhumanity to man. No longer is she merely the fluent and gifted sonneteer of love. Now she writes ironically, passionately, of a world stumbling through misery and evil toward a but dimly perceived goal where the dignity of even the least of these shall be the concern of all. Her published works are:

Renascence and Other Poems	1917
A Few Figs from Thistles	1920
Aria da Capo	1920
The Lamp and the Bell	1921
Second April	1921
The Harp Weaver and Other Poems	1924
The King's Henchman	1927
The Buck in the Snow	1928
Fatal Interview	1931
The Princess Marries the Page	1932
Wine from these Grapes	1934
Conversation at Midnight	1937
Huntsman, What Quarry	1939
Make Bright the Arrows	1940
There Are No Islands, Any More	1940
Collected Sonnets	1941
Collected Lyrics	1943

Sources of *The King's Henchman*

IN mid-February, 1927, the famous Metropolitan Opera House in New York was the scene of one of the most eagerly awaited events in its history, the world premiere of Edna St. Vincent Millay's new verse drama, *The King's Henchman,* set to music by Deems Taylor. Greeted by many critics as America's first great operatic drama, *The King's Henchman* has by now won for itself a secure position among our time's outstanding works.

What sort of story is it, and how did it come to be written? Speaking of the original conception of *The King's Henchman,* Miss Millay has said, "I wanted to write an opera that would have to do entirely with us in this country but it did not work out that way. An Indian theme was suggested but King Eadgar and his people are much nearer to us than the Indians. The Anglo-Saxons are something very near to us in spirit." The story of Eadgar was unearthed from the quaint and archaic pages of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

The Chronicle, compiled by monks in the earliest days of Christian England, tells of Eadgar of Essex who was king of England in the tenth century. Although he ascended the throne in 961, he was not crowned until 973. He is reported to have been somewhat of a Don Juan and so forceful a character that he compelled eight vassal kings to row him in a barge on the River Dee after his coronation. According to the original chronicle, Eadgar sent his best friend and finest warrior, Aethelwold, to Devon to fetch a beautiful girl whom he intended to make his bride. The ancient story also narrates how Aethelwold fell in love with the girl himself and married her, telling the King she was not worthy to be Queen. When Eadgar discovered the trick, he was highly resentful and shortly thereafter sent Aethel-

wold to fight the Danes, in which combat he was killed.

Miss Millay has strengthened this story by having Aethelwold meet Aelfreda under the spell of All Hallows' Eve and by having Aethelwold finally take his own life in the presence of the King. The true atmosphere and language of the period have been preserved with remarkable realism, however. There are no words in the entire play which were not current in England in some form or meaning a thousand years ago, and except for a handful, all are pure Anglo-Saxon. The folk song used in the first and third acts, *Caesar, Great Wert Thou,* is musically an authentic one, an adaptation of the Cornish song, *My Johnny Was a Shoemaker.*

Verse Patterns

The King's Henchman

As suits a more dramatic presentation, Miss Millay uses a variety of verse patterns. Maccus' opening song follows the design of Anglo-Saxon poetry which depends, not upon rhyme, but upon internal alliteration combined with a caesura or pause in the middle of the line:

> High up the headland; Hoarse as the howling
> Winds of the winter, When the lean wolves
> Harry the hindmost,

In using this form early in the play, she sets the historical mood.

Frequently, however, she uses a loose iambic pentameter, as:

> Let 'em/ not feaze/ thee, Os/lac, my lad;/ sleep on./

More often, though, her lines are short and entirely unrhymed, depending for their effect upon cadence rather than regularly recurring beat. Such poetry has in modern times been given the name of Free Verse. Note the following selection:

> Howe'er it be,
> And be she rich as silk,
> Eadgar will naught of her,
> If she be not fair as the moon.

Part II

IDYLLS OF THE KING

THE COMING OF ARTHUR

About 500 A.D. Arthur was King of England. At that time the Romans, after ruling the land for three centuries, had abandoned it to the rising power of the heathen Saxon invaders from Germany, led by the powerful brother chieftains Hengist and Horsa.

The Britons, who were Christians, resisted bravely under the leadership of their heroic warrior King Arthur. After he had won twelve great victories over the enemy and had finally routed them, he bent all his energies toward bringing peace and unity to England. He embodies the ideal virtues of knighthood. Many stories have been told about him and his Round Table of Knights. Some of these stories are undoubtedly based on fact while some are merely the exaggerated imagination of the story-teller.

In this idyll Tennyson tells of the Coming of Arthur. As you read, note how the poet has purposely clouded Arthur's birth in mystery. Can you imagine why?


G.M. RICHARDS

Idylls of the King

THE COMING OF ARTHUR

LEODOGRAN, the king of Cameliard,
Had one fair daughter, and none other child;
And she was fairest of all flesh on earth,
Guinevere, and in her his one delight.

For many a petty king ere Arthur came
Ruled in this isle and, ever waging war
Each upon other, wasted all the land;
And still from time to time the heathen host
Swarm'd over-seas, and harried what was left.
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.
For first Aurelius lived and fought and died,
And after him King Uther fought and died,
But either fail'd to make the kingdom one.
And after these King Arthur for a space,
And thro' the puissance of his Table Round,
Drew all their petty princedoms under him,
Their king and head, and made a realm and reign'd.

And thus the land of Cameliard was waste,

[13] *Aurelius*—Descendant of the last Roman Emperor of Britain.
[17] *Table Round*—King Arthur's table was round so that all the men seated at it would be equal, and no one would be seated higher at the table than his fellow knight.

Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein,
And none or few to scare or chase the beast;
So that wild dog and wolf and boar and bear
Came night and day, and rooted in the fields,
And wallow'd in the gardens of the King.
And ever and anon the wolf would steal
The children and devour, but now and then,
Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat
To human sucklings; and the children, housed
In her foul den, there at their meat would growl,
And mock their foster-mother on four feet,
Till, straighten'd, they grew up to wolf-like men,
Worse than the wolves. And King Leodogran
Groan'd for the Roman legions here again
And Cæsar's eagle: then his brother king,
Urien, assail'd him: last a heathen horde,
Reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood,
And on the spike that split the mother's heart
Spitting the child, brake on him, till, amazed,
He knew not whither he should turn for aid.

But—for he heard of Arthur newly crown'd,
Tho' not without an uproar made by those
Who cried, "He is not Uther's son"—the King
Sent to him, saying, "Arise, and help us thou!
For here between the man and beast we die."

And Arthur yet had done no deed of arms,
But heard the call and came: and Guinevere
Stood by the castle walls to watch him pass;
But since he neither wore on helm or shield
The golden symbol of his kinglihood,

[50] *The golden symbol*—*A golden dragon was the symbol of a king.*

But rode a simple knight among his knights,
And many of these in richer arms than he,
She saw him not, or mark'd not, if she saw,
One among many, tho' his face was bare.
But Arthur, looking downward as he past,
Felt the light of her eyes into his life
Smite on the sudden, yet rode on, and pitch'd
His tents beside the forest. Then he drave
The heathen; after, slew the beast, and fell'd
The forest, letting in the sur id made
Broad pathways for the hur and the knight,
And so return'd.

For while he linger'd there,
A doubt that ever smoulder'd in the hearts
Of those great lords and barons of his realm
Flash'd forth and into war; for most of these,
Colleaguing with a score of petty kings,
Made head against him, crying: "Who is he
That he should rule us? who hath proven him
King Uther's son? for lo! we look at him,
And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice,
Are like to those of Uther whom we knew.
This is the son of Gorloïs, not the King;
This is the son of Anton, not the King."

And Arthur, passing thence to battle, felt
Travail, and throes and agonies of the life,
Desiring to be join'd with Guinevere,
And thinking as he rode: "Her father said
That there between the man and beast they die.
Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts

Up to my throne and side by side with me?
What happiness to reign a lonely king,
Vext—O ye stars that shudder over me,
O earth that soundest hollow under me,
Vext with waste dreams? for saving I be join'd
To her that is the fairest under heaven,
I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
And cannot will my will nor work my work
Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm
Victor and lord. But were I join'd with her,
Then might we live together as one life,
And reigning with one will in everything
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live."

Thereafter—as he speaks who tells the tale—
When Arthur reach'd a field of battle bright
With pitch'd pavilions of his foe, the world
Was all so clear about him that he saw
The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,
And even in high day the morning star.
So when the King had set his banner broad,
At once from either side, with trumpet-blast,
And shouts, and clarions shrilling unto blood,
The long-lanced battle let their horses run.
And now the barons and the kings prevail'd,
And now the King, as here and there that war
Went swaying; but the Powers who walk the world
Made lightnings and great thunders over him,
And dazed all eyes, till Arthur by main might,
And mightier of his hands with every blow,
And leading all his knighthood threw the kings

Carádos, Urien, Cradlemont of Wales,
Claudius, and Clariance of Northumberland,
The King Brandagoras of Latangor,
With Anguisant of Erin, Morganore,
And Lot of Orkney. Then, before a voice
As dreadful as the shout of one who sees
To one who sins, and deems himself alone
And all the world asleep, they swerved and brake
Flying, and Arthur call'd to stay the brands
That hack'd among the flyers, "Ho! they yield!"
So like a painted battle the war stood
Silenced, the living quiet as the dead,
And in the heart of Arthur joy was lord.
He laugh'd upon his warrior whom he loved
And honor'd most. "Thou dost not doubt me King,
So well thine arm hath wrought for me to-day."
"Sir and my liege," he cried, "the fire of God
Descends upon thee in the battle-field:
I know thee for my King!" Whereat the two,
For each had warded either in the fight,
Sware on the field of death a deathless love.
And Arthur said, "Man's word is God in man:
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death."

Then quickly from the foughten field he sent
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere,
His new-made knights, to King Leodogran,

124–5 *His warrior whom he loved and honor'd most—Lancelot.*

132 *Man's word is God in man—Man's oath is sacred. (As you read the Idylls, note how each kept the oath.)*

Saying, "If I in aught have served thee well,
Give me thy daughter Guinevere to wife."

Whom when he heard, Leodogran in heart
Debating—"How should I that am a king,
However much he holp me at my need,
Give my one daughter saving to a king,
And a king's son?"—lifted his voice, and call'd
A hoary man, his chamberlain, to whom
He trusted all things, and of him required
His counsel: "Knowest thou aught of Arthur's birth?"

Then spake the hoary chamberlain and said:
"Sir King, there be but two old men that know;
And each is twice as old as I: and one
Is Merlin, the wise man that ever served
King Uther thro' his magic art; and one
Is Merlin's master—so they call him—Bleys,
Who taught him magic; but the scholar ran
Before the master, and so far that Bleys
Laid magic by, and sat him down, and wrote
All things and whatsoever Merlin did
In one great annal-book, where after-years
Will learn the secret of our Arthur's birth."

To whom the King Leodogran replied:
"O friend, had I been holpen half as well
By this King Arthur as by thee to-day,
Then beast and man had had their share of me;
But summon here before us yet once more
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere."

Then, when they came before him, the King said:
"I have seen the cuckoo chased by lesser fowl,
And reason in the chase; but wherefore now
Do these your lords stir up the heat of war,
Some calling Arthur born of Gorloïs,
Others of Anton? Tell me, ye yourselves,
Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther's son?"

And Ulfius and Brastias answer'd, "Ay."
Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights
Knighted by Arthur at his crowning, spake—
For bold in heart and act and word was he,
Whenever slander breathed against the King—

"Sir, there be many rumors on this head:
For there be those who hate him in their hearts,
Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet,
And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man;
And there be those who deem him more than man,
And dream he dropt from heaven: but my belief
In all this matter—so ye care to learn—
Sir, for ye know that in King Uther's time
The prince and warrior Gorloïs, he that held
Tintagil castle by the Cornish sea,
Was wedded with a winsome wife, Ygerne;
And daughters had she borne him,—one whereof,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent,
Hath ever like a loyal sister cleaved
To Arthur,—but a son she had not borne.
And Uther cast upon her eyes of love;
But she, a stainless wife to Gorloïs,
So loathed the bright dishonor of his love

That Gorloïs and King Uther went to war,
And overthrown was Gorloïs and slain.
Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged
Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men,
Seeing the mighty swarm about their walls,
Left her and fled, and Uther enter'd in,
And there was none to call to but himself.
So, compass'd by the power of the King,
Enforced she was to wed him in her tears,
And with a shameful swiftness; afterward,
Not many moons, King Uther died himself,
Moaning and wailing for an heir to rule
After him, lest the realm should go to wrack.
And that same night, the night of the new year,
By reason of the bitterness and grief
That vext his mother, all before his time
Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born
Deliver'd at a secret postern-gate
To Merlin, to be holden far apart
Until his hour should come; because the lords
Of that fierce day were as the lords of this,
Wild beasts, and surely would have torn the child
Piecemeal among them, had they known; for each
But sought to rule for his own self and hand,
And many hated Uther for the sake
Of Gorloïs. Wherefore Merlin took the child,
And gave him to Sir Anton, an old knight
And ancient friend of Uther; and his wife
Nursed the young prince, and rear'd him with her own;
And no man knew. And ever since the lords
Have foughten like wild beasts among themselves,
So that the realm has gone to wrack; but now,

This year, when Merlin—for his hour had come—
Brought Arthur forth, and set him in the hall,
Proclaiming, 'Here is Uther's heir, your king,'
A hundred voices cried: 'Away with him!
No king of ours! a son of Gorloïs he;
Or else the child of Anton, and no king,
Or else baseborn.' Yet Merlin thro' his craft,
And while the people clamor'd for a king,
Had Arthur crown'd; but after, the great lords
Banded, and so brake out in open war."

Then while the King debated with himself
If Arthur were the child of shamefulness,
Or born the son of Gorloïs after death,
Or Uther's son and born before his time,
Or whether there were truth in anything
Said by these three, there came to Cameliard,
With Gawain and young Modred, her two sons,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent;
Whom as he could, not as he would, the King
Made feast for, saying, as they sat at meat:
"A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas.
Ye come from Arthur's court. Victor his men
Report him! Yea, but ye—think ye this king—
So many those that hate him, and so strong,
So few his knights, however brave they be—
Hath body enow to hold his foemen down?"

"O King," she cried, "and I will tell thee: few,
Few, but all brave, all of one mind with him;
For I was near him when the savage yells

Of Uther's peerage died, and Arthur sat
Crowned on the daïs, and his warriors cried,
'Be thou the king, and we will work thy will
Who love thee.' Then the King in low deep tones,
And simple words of great authority,
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,
Some flush'd, and others dazed, as one who wakes
Half-blinded at the coming of a light.

"But when he spake, and cheer'd his Table Round
With large, divine, and comfortable words,
Beyond my tongue to tell thee—I beheld
From eye to eye thro' all their Order flash
A momentary likeness of the King;
And ere it left their faces, thro' the cross
And those around it and the Crucified,
Down from the casement over Arthur, smote
Flame-color, vert, and azure, in three rays,
One falling upon each of three fair queens
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.

"And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit
And hundred winters are but as the hands
Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege.

"And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,
Who knows a subtler magic than his own—

[276] *Three fair queens—Faith, Hope, and Charity (Love).*

Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.
She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,
Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist
Of incense curl'd about her, and her face
Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;
But there was heard among the holy hymns
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells
Down in a deep—calm, whatsoever storms
May shake the world—and when the surface rolls,
Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.

"There likewise I beheld Excalibur
Before him at his crowning borne, the sword
That rose from out the bosom of the lake,
And Arthur row'd across and took it—rich
With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,
Bewildering heart and eye—the blade so bright
That men are blinded by it—on one side,
Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,
'Take me,' but turn the blade and ye shall see,
And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
'Cast me away!' And sad was Arthur's face
Taking it, but old Merlin counsell'd him,
'Take thou and strike! the time to cast away
Is yet far-off.' So this great brand the king
Took, and by this will beat his foemen down."

Thereat Leodogran rejoiced, but thought
To sift his doubtings to the last, and ask'd,
Fixing full eyes of question on her face,
"The swallow and the swift are near akin,

298 *Elfin Urim*—*The jewels sparkled with fairy charms.*

But thou art closer to this noble prince,
Being his own dear sister"; and she said,
"Daughter of Gorloïs and Ygerne am I";
"And therefore Arthur's sister?" ask'd the King.
She answer'd, "These be secret things," and sign'd
To those two sons to pass, and let them be.
And Gawain went, and breaking into song
Sprang out, and follow'd by his flying hair
Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw;
But Modred laid his ear beside the doors,
And there half-heard—the same that afterward
Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom.

And then the Queen made answer: "What know I?
For dark my mother was in eyes and hair,
And dark in hair and eyes am I; and dark
Was Gorloïs; yea, and dark was Uther too,
Wellnigh to blackness; but this king is fair
Beyond the race of Britons and of men.
Moreover, always in my mind I hear
A cry from out the dawning of my life,
A mother weeping, and I hear her say,
'O that ye had some brother, pretty one,
To guard thee on the rough ways of the world.' "

"Ay," said the King, "and hear ye such a cry?
But when did Arthur chance upon thee first?"

But Modred laid his ear beside the doors—Note the traitorous character of Modred compared with that of his brother Gawain.

"O King!" she cried, "and I will tell thee true:
He found me first when yet a little maid:
Beaten I had been for a little fault
Whereof I was not guilty; and out I ran
And flung myself down on a bank of heath,
And hated this fair world and all therein,
And wept, and wish'd that I were dead; and he—
I know not whether of himself he came,
Or brought by Merlin, who, they say, can walk
Unseen at pleasure—he was at my side,
And spake sweet words, and comforted my heart,
And dried my tears, being a child with me.
And many a time he came, and evermore
As I grew greater grew with me; and sad
At times he seem'd, and sad with him was I,
Stern too at times, and then I loved him not,
But sweet again, and then I loved him well.
And now of late I see him less and less,
But those first days had golden hours for me,
For then I surely thought he would be king.

"But let me tell thee now another tale:
For Bleys, our Merlin's master, as they say,
Died but of late, and sent his cry to me,
To hear him speak before he left his life.
Shrunk like a fairy changeling lay the mage;
And when I enter'd told me that himself
And Merlin ever served about the King,
Uther, before he died; and on the night
When Uther in Tintagil past away

358 *Another tale*—*Arthur's birth is surrounded in mystery.*

Moaning and wailing for an heir, the two
Left the still King, and passing forth to breathe,
Then from the castle gateway by the chasm
Descending thro' the dismal night—a night
In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost—
Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
It seem'd in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof
A dragon wing'd, and all from stem to stern
Bright with a shining people on the decks,
And gone as soon as seen. And then the two
Dropt to the cove, and watch'd the great sea fall,
Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame:
And down the wave and in the flame was borne
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried, 'The King!
Here is an heir for Uther!' And the fringe
Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,
Lash'd at the wizard as he spake the word,
And all at once all round him rose in fire,
So that the child and he were clothed in fire.
And presently thereafter follow'd calm,
Free sky and stars: 'And this same child,' he said,
'Is he who reigns; nor could I part in peace
Till this were told.' And saying this the seer
Went thro' the strait and dreadful pass of death,
Not ever to be question'd any more
Save on the further side; but when I met
Merlin, and ask'd him if these things were truth—

The shining dragon and the naked child
Descending in the glory of the seas—
He laugh'd as is his wont, and answer'd me
In riddling triplets of old time, and said:—

" 'Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow in the sky!
A young man will be wiser by and by;
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.

" 'Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow on the lea!
And truth is this to me, and that to thee;
And truth or clothed or naked let it be.

" 'Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows:
Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

"So Merlin riddling anger'd me; but thou
Fear not to give this King thine only child,
Guinevere: so great bards of him will sing
Hereafter; and dark sayings from of old
Ranging and ringing thro' the minds of men,
And echo'd by old folk beside their fires
For comfort after their wage-work is done,
Speak of the King; and Merlin in our time
Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
Tho' men may wound him that he will not die,
But pass, again to come, and then or now
Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,
Till these and all men hail him for their king."

She spake and King Leodogran rejoiced,
But musing "Shall I answer yea or nay?"
Doubted, and drowsed, nodded and slept, and saw,
Dreaming, a slope of land that ever grew,
Field after field, up to a height, the peak
Haze-hidden and thereon a phantom king,
Now looming, and now lost; and on the slope
The sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven,
Fire glimpsed; and all the land from roof and rick,
In drifts of smoke before a rolling wind,
Stream'd to the peak, and mingled with the haze
And made it thicker; while the phantom king
Sent out at times a voice; and here or there
Stood one who pointed toward the voice, the rest
Slew on and burnt, crying, "No king of ours,
No son of Uther, and no king of ours;"
Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze
Descended, and the solid earth became
As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven,
Crown'd. And Leodogran awoke, and sent
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere,
Back to the court of Arthur answering yea.

Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved
And honor'd most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth
And bring the Queen, and watch'd him from the gates;
And Lancelot past away among the flowers—
For then was latter April—and return'd
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.

447–8 *Ride forth and bring the Queen—It is Lancelot who first meets Guinevere. Why is this Arthur's great mistake?*

To whom arrived, by Dubric the high saint,
Chief of the church in Britain, and before
The stateliest of her altar-shrines, the King
That morn was married, while in stainless white,
The fair beginners of a nobler time,
And glorying in their vows and him, his knights
Stood round him, and rejoicing in his joy.
Far shone the fields of May thro' open door,
The sacred altar blossom'd white with May,
The Sun of May descended on their King,
They gazed on all earth's beauty in their Queen,
Roll'd incense, and there past along the hymns
A voice as of the waters, while the two
Sware at the shrine of Christ a deathless love:
And Arthur said, "Behold, thy doom is mine.
Let chance what will, I love thee to the death!"
To whom the Queen replied with drooping eyes,
"King and my lord, I love thee to the death!"
And holy Dubric spread his hands and spake:
"Reign ye, and live and love, and make the world
Other, and may thy Queen be one with thee,
And all this Order of thy Table Round
Fulfil the boundless purpose of their King!"

So Dubric said; but when they left the shrine
Great lords from Rome before the portal stood,
In scornful stillness gazing as they past;
Then while they paced a city all on fire
With sun and cloth of gold, the trumpets blew,
And Arthur's knighthood sang before the King:—

476 *Great Lords from Rome—Envoys to demand an annual tribute.*

"Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May!
Blow trumpet, the long night hath roll'd away!
Blow thro' the living world—'Let the King reign!'

"Shall Rome or Heathen rule in Arthur's realm?
Flash brand and lance, fall battle-axe upon helm,
Fall battle-axe, and flash brand! Let the King reign!

"Strike for the King and live! his knights have heard
That God hath told the King a secret word.
Fall battle-axe, and flash brand! Let the King reign!

"Blow trumpet! he will lift us from the dust.
Blow trumpet! live the strength, and die the lust!
Clang battle-axe, and clash brand! Let the King reign!

"Strike for the King and die! and if thou diest,
The King is king, and ever wills the highest.
Clang battle-axe, and clash brand! Let the King reign!

"Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May!
Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!
Clang battle-axe, and clash brand! Let the King reign!

"The King will follow Christ, and we the King,
In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing.
Fall battle-axe, and clash brand! Let the King reign!"

So sang the knighthood, moving to their hall.
There at the banquet those great lords from Rome,
The slowly-fading mistress of the world,

503–4 *Rome, the slowly fading mistress of the world—The Roman empire was losing its former greatness at this time.*

Strode in and claim'd their tribute as of yore.
But Arthur spake: "Behold, for these have sworn
To wage my wars, and worship me their King;
The old order changeth, yielding place to new;
And we that fight for our fair father Christ,
Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old
To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,
No tribute will we pay." So those great lords
Drew back in wrath, and Arthur strove with Rome.

And Arthur and his knighthood for a space
Were all one will, and thro' that strength the King
Drew in the petty princedoms under him,
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame
The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reign'd.

GARETH AND LYNETTE

Happily married, King Arthur and Guinevere have created a court which stands as a beacon to the brave and ambitious knights of all Britain. Here flourish the high ideals of chivalry, uniting utmost courage with great gentleness, stern justice and youthful delight in combat. In this story of young Gareth, Tennyson introduces us to one of the most likable of all his heroes in a series of highly exciting adventures.

As you read this Idyll (which is considered by many to be the best that Tennyson wrote), note the spirit of spring and youth and beauty that pervade the lines. Here is the kingdom pictured at its best. There is no hint as yet of any evil in King Arthur's Court. Gareth, the perfect hero, starts out under adverse circumstances to battle life itself—youth, middle age and old age in the form of three mighty knights. Do you think that if one has fought valiantly for the right in his youth and throughout his entire life, he would be afraid of death, or would he look forward to it as the beginning of a new adventure?

GARETH AND LYNETTE

THE last tall son of Lot and Bellicent,
And tallest, Gareth, in a showerful spring
Stared at the spate. A slender-shafted pine
Lost footing, fell, and so was whirl'd away.
"How he went down," said Gareth, "as a false knight
Or evil king before my lance, if lance
Were mine to use—O senseless cataract,
Bearing all down in thy precipitancy—
And yet thou art but swollen with cold snows
And mine is living blood: thou dost His will,
The Maker's, and not knowest, and I that know,
Have strength and wit, in my good mother's hall
Linger with vacillating obedience,
Prison'd, and kept and coax'd and whistled to—
Since the good mother holds me still a child!
Good mother is bad mother unto me!
A worse were better; yet no worse would I.
Heaven yield her for it, but in me put force
To weary her ears with one continuous prayer,
Until she let me fly discaged to sweep
In ever-highering eagle-circles up
To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop
Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,
A knight of Arthur, working out his will,
To cleanse the world. Why, Gawain, when he came
With Modred hither in the summer-time,
Ask'd me to tilt with him, the proven knight.

25–32 *Gareth, Gawain, and Modred are brothers, sons of King Lot and Queen Bellicent of Orkney, Scotland. As you read these* Idylls, *note the difference in the character of each brother.*

Modred for want of worthier was the judge.
Then I so shook him in the saddle, he said,
'Thou hast half prevail'd against me,' said so—he—
Tho' Modred biting his thin lips was mute,
For he is alway sullen: what care I?"

And Gareth went, and hovering round her chair
Ask'd, "Mother, tho' ye count me still the child,
Sweet mother, do ye love the child?" She laugh'd,
"Thou art but a wild-goose to question it."
"Then, mother, an ye love the child," he said,
"Being a goose and rather tame than wild,
Hear the child's story." "Yea, my well-beloved,
An 'twere but of the goose and golden eggs."

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes:
"Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine
Was finer gold than any goose can lay;
For this an eagle, a royal eagle, laid
Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm
As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.
And there was ever haunting round the palm
A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw
The splendor sparkling from aloft, and thought,
'An I could climb and lay my hand upon it,
Then were I wealthier than a leash of kings.'
But ever when he reach'd a hand to climb,
One that had loved him from his childhood caught
And stay'd him, 'Climb not lest thou break thy neck,
I charge thee by my love,' and so the boy,
Sweet mother, neither clomb nor brake his neck,
But brake his very heart in pining for it,
And past away."

To whom the mother said,
"True love, sweet son, had risk'd himself and climb'd,
And handed down the golden treasure to him."

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes:
"Gold? said I gold?—ay then, why he, or she,
Or whoseso'er it was, or half the world
Had ventured—*had* the thing I spake of been
Mere gold—but this was all of that true steel
Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,
And lightnings play'd about it in the storm,
And all the little fowl were flurried at it,
And there were cries and clashings in the nest,
That sent him from his senses: let me go."

Then Bellicent bemoan'd herself and said:
"Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness?
Lo, where thy father Lot beside the hearth
Lies like a log, and all but smoulder'd out!
For ever since when traitor to the King
He fought against him in the barons' war,
And Arthur gave him back his territory,
His age hath slowly droopt, and now lies there
A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburiable,
No more; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows.
And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall,
Albeit neither loved with that full love
I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love,
Stay therefore thou; red berries charm the bird,
And thee, mine innocent, the jousts, the wars,
Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang
Of wrench'd or broken limb—an often chance
In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls.

Frights to my heart; but stay: follow the deer
By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns;
So make thy manhood mightier day by day;
Sweet is the chase: and I will seek thee out
Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace
Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone year,
Till falling into Lot's forgetfulness
I know not thee, myself, nor anything.
Stay, my best son! ye are yet more boy than man."

Then Gareth: "An ye hold me yet for child,
Hear yet once more the story of the child.
For, mother, there was once a king, like ours.
The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable,
Ask'd for a bride; and thereupon the king
Set two before him. One was fair, strong, arm'd—
But to be won by force—and many men
Desired her; one, good lack, no man desired.
And these were the conditions of the king:
That save he won the first by force, he needs
Must wed that other, whom no man desired,
A red-faced bride who knew herself so vile
That evermore she long'd to hide herself,
Nor fronted man or woman, eye to eye—
Yea—some she cleaved to, but they died of her.
And one—they call'd her Fame; and one—O mother,
How can ye keep me tether'd to you?—Shame.
Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.

116–8 *Note the high ideals of Gareth and of King Arthur's Court at this time. Compare these lines with the oath that all of the knights of the Round Table had to take. (See* Guinevere *lines 464-474.)*



Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King—
Else, wherefore born?"

very young + idealistic

To whom the mother said:
"Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not,
Or will not deem him, wholly proven King—
Albeit in mine own heart I knew him King
When I was frequent with him in my youth,
And heard him kingly speak, and doubted him
No more than he, himself; but felt him mine,
Of closest kin to me: yet—wilt thou leave
Thine easeful biding here, and risk thine all,
Life, limbs, for one that is not proven King?
Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth
Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son."

And Gareth answer'd quickly: "Not an hour,
So that ye yield me—I will walk thro' fire,
Mother, to gain it—your full leave to go.
Not proven, who swept the dust of ruin'd Rome
From off the threshold of the realm, and crush'd
The idolaters, and made the people free?
Who should be king save him who makes us free?"

So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain
To break him from the intent to which he grew,
Found her son's will unwaveringly one,
She answer'd craftily: "Will ye walk thro' fire?
Who walks thro' fire will hardly heed the smoke.
Ay, go then, an ye must: only one proof,
Before thou ask the King to make thee knight,
Of thine obedience and thy love to me,
Thy mother,—I demand."

And Gareth cried:
"A hard one, or a hundred, so I go.

Nay—quick! the proof to prove me to the quick!"

But slowly spake the mother looking at him:
"Prince, thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall,
And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks
Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves,
And those that hand the dish across the bar.
Nor shalt thou tell thy name to any one.
And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day."

For so the Queen believed that when her son
Beheld his only way to glory lead
Low down thro' villain kitchen-vassalage,
Her own true Gareth was too princely-proud
To pass thereby; so should he rest with her,
Closed in her castle from the sound of arms.

Silent awhile was Gareth, then replied:
"The thrall in person may be free in soul,
And I shall see the jousts. Thy son am I,
And, since thou art my mother, must obey.
I therefore yield me freely to thy will;
For hence will I, disguised, and hire myself
To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knaves
Nor tell my name to any—no, not the King."

Gareth awhile linger'd. The mother's eye
Full of the wistful fear that he would go,
And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turn'd,

148–160 *Queen Bellicent hopes to discourage Gareth from leaving her by suggesting that he must first serve in King Arthur's kitchen.*

Perplext his outward purpose, till an hour
When, waken'd by the wind which with full voice
Swept bellowing thro' the darkness on to dawn,
He rose, and out of slumber calling two
That still had tended on him from his birth,
Before the wakeful mother heard him, went.

The three were clad like tillers of the soil.
Southward they set their faces. The birds made
Melody on branch and melody in mid air.
The damp hill-slopes were quicken'd into green,
And the live green had kindled into flowers,
For it was past the time of Easter-day.

So, when their feet were planted on the plain
That broaden'd toward the base of Camelot,
Far off they saw the silver-misty morn
Rolling her smoke about the royal mount,
That rose between the forest and the field.
At times the summit of the high city flash'd;
At times the spires and turrets half-way down
Prick'd thro' the mist; at times the great gate shone
Only, that open'd on the field below:
Anon, the whole fair city had disappear'd.

Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,
One crying, "Let us go no further, lord:
Here is a city of enchanters, built
By fairy kings." The second echo'd him,

[185] *Camelot*—An imaginary town in southwestern England where King Arthur held his Court.

"Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home
To northward, that this king is not the King,
But only changeling out of Fairyland,
Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery
And Merlin's glamour." Then the first again,
"Lord, there is no such city anywhere,
But all a vision."

Gareth answer'd them
With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow
In his own blood, his princedom, youth, and hopes,
To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea;
So push'd them all unwilling toward the gate.
And there was no gate like it under heaven.
For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,
The Lady of the Lake stood: all her dress
Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
But like the cross her great and goodly arms
Stretch'd under all the cornice and upheld:
And drops of water fell from either hand;
And down from one a sword was hung, from one
A censer, either worn with wind and storm;
And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish;
And in the space to left of her, and right,
Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,
New things and old co-twisted, as if Time
Were nothing, so inveterately that men
Were giddy gazing there; and over all
High on the top were those three queens, the friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need.

[212] *The Lady of the Lake—Note that she is here represented as religion. The sacred fish, embroidered on her dress, is the sign of the Church.*

Then those with Gareth for so long a space
Stared at the figures that at last it seem'd
The dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings
Began to move, seethe, twine, and curl: they call'd
To Gareth, "Lord, the gateway is alive."

And Gareth likewise on them fixt his eyes
So long that even to him they seem'd to move.
Out of the city a blast of music peal'd.
Back from the gate started the three, to whom
From out thereunder came an ancient man,
Long-bearded, saying, "Who be ye, my sons?"

Then Gareth: "We be tillers of the soil,
Who leaving share in furrow come to see
The glories of our King: but these, my men,—
Your city moved so weirdly in the mist—
Doubt if the King be king at all, or come
From Fairyland; and whether this be built
By magic, and by fairy kings and queens;
Or whether there be any city at all,
Or all a vision: and this music now
Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the truth."

Then that old Seer made answer, playing on him
And saying: "Son, I have seen the good ship sail
Keel upward, and mast downward, in the heavens,
And solid turrets topsy-turvy in air:
And here is truth; but an it please thee not,
Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me.
For truly, as thou sayest, a fairy king
And fairy queens have built the city, son;

They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft
Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,
And built it to the music of their harps.
And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,
For there is nothing in it as it seems
Saving the King; tho' some there be that hold
The King a shadow, and the city real:
Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass
Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become
A thrall to his enchantments, for the King
Will bind thee by such vows as is a shame
A man should not be bound by, yet the which
No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear,
Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide
Without, among the cattle of the field.
For an ye heard a music, like enow
They are building still, seeing the city is built
To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built for ever."

Gareth spake
Anger'd: "Old master, reverence thine own beard
That looks as white as utter truth, and seems
Wellnigh as long as thou are statured tall!
Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been
To thee fair-spoken?"

But the Seer replied:
"Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards:

272–4 *The city . . . never built at all—King Arthur's Court was built on ideals that were never realized but which endure forever.*

'Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion'?
I mock thee not but as thou mockest me,
And all that see thee, for thou art not who
Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art.
And now thou goest up to mock the King,
Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie."

Unmockingly the mocker ending here
Turn'd to the right, and past along the plain;
Whom Gareth looking after said: "My men,
Our one white lie sits like a little ghost
Here on the threshold of our enterprise.
Let love be blamed for it, not she, nor I:
Well, we will make amends."

With all good cheer
He spake and laugh'd, then enter'd with his twain
Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces
And stately, rich in emblem and the work
Of ancient kings who did their days in stone;
Which Merlin's hand, the Mage at Arthur's court,
Knowing all arts, had touch'd, and everywhere,
At Arthur's ordinance, tipt with lessening peak
And pinnacle, and had made it spire to heaven.
And ever and anon a knight would pass
Outward, or inward to the hall: his arms
Clash'd; and the sound was good to Gareth's ear.
And out of bower and casement shyly glanced
Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love;
And all about a healthful people stept
As in the presence of a gracious king.

Then into hall Gareth ascending heard
A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld
Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall
The splendor of the presence of the King
Throned, and delivering doom—and look'd no more—
But felt his young heart hammering in his ears,
And thought, "For this half-shadow of a lie
The truthful King will doom me when I speak."
Yet pressing on, tho' all in fear to find
Sir Gawain or Sir Modred, saw nor one
Nor other, but in all the listening eyes
Of those tall knights that ranged about the throne
Clear honor shining like the dewy star
Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure
Affection, and the light of victory,
And glory gain'd, and evermore to gain.

Then came a widow crying to the King:
"A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft
From my dead lord a field with violence;
For howsoe'er at first he proffer'd gold,
Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes,
We yielded not; and then he reft us of it
Perforce and left us neither gold nor field."

Said Arthur, "Whether would ye? gold or field?"
To whom the woman weeping, "Nay, my lord,
The field was pleasant in my husband's eye."

And Arthur: "Have thy pleasant field again,
And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,
According to the years. No boon is here,

But justice, so thy say be proven true.
Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did
Would shape himself a right!"

And while she past,
Came yet another widow crying to him:
"A boon, Sir King! Thine enemy, King, am I.
With thine own hand thou slewest my dear lord,
A knight of Uther in the barons' war,
When Lot and many another rose and fought
Against thee, saying thou wert basely born.
I held with these, and loathe to ask thee aught.
Yet lo! my husband's brother had my son
Thrall'd in his castle, and hath starved him dead,
And standeth seized of that inheritance
Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son.
So, tho' I scarce can ask it thee for hate,
Grant me some knight to do the battle for me,
Kill the foul thief, and wreak me for my son."

Then strode a good knight forward, crying to him,
"A boon, Sir King! I am her kinsman, I.
Give me to right her wrong, and slay the man."

Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal, and cried,
"A boon, Sir King! even that thou grant her none,
This railer, that hath mock'd thee in full hall—
None; or the wholesome boon of gyve and gag."

But Arthur: "We sit King, to help the wrong'd
Thro' all our realm. The woman loves her lord.
Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates!

The kings of old had doom'd thee to the flames;
Aurelius Emrys would have scourged thee dead,
And Uther slit thy tongue: but get thee hence—
Lest that rough humor of the kings of old
Return upon me! Thou that art her kin,
Go likewise; lay him low and slay him not,
But bring him here, that I may judge the right,
According to the justice of the King:
Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King
Who lived and died for men, the man shall die."

Then came in hall the messenger of Mark,
A name of evil savor in the land,
The Cornish king. In either hand he bore
What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines
A field of charlock in the sudden sun
Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold,
Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt,
Delivering that his lord, the vassal king,
Was even upon his way to Camelot;
For having heard that Arthur of his grace
Had made his goodly cousin Tristram knight,
And, for himself was of the greater state,
Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord
Would yield him this large honor all the more;
So pray'd him well to accept this cloth of gold,
In token of true heart and fealty.

Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend
In pieces, and so cast it on the hearth.
An oak-tree smoulder'd there. "The goodly knight!
What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?"

For, midway down the side of that long hall,
A stately pile,—whereof along the front,
Some blazon'd, some but carven, and some blank,
There ran a treble range of stony shields,—
Rose, and high-arching overbrow'd the hearth.
And under every shield a knight was named.
For this was Arthur's custom in his hall:
When some good knight had done one noble deed,
His arms were carven only; but if twain,
His arms were blazon'd also; but if none,
The shield was blank and bare, without a sign
Saving the name beneath: and ~~Gareth~~ saw
The shield of Gawain blazon'd rich and bright,
And Modred's blank as death: and Arthur cried
~~To rend~~ the cloth and cast it on the hearth.

"More like are we to reave him of his crown
Than make him knight because men call him king.
The kings we found, ye know we stay'd their hands
From war among themselves, but left them kings;
Of whom were any bounteous, merciful,
Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enroll'd
Among us, and they sit within our hall.
But Mark hath tarnish'd the great name of king,
As Mark would sully the low state of churl;
And, seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold,
Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes,
Lest we should lap him up in cloth of lead,
Silenced for ever—craven—a man of plots,
Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings—
No fault of thine: let Kay the seneschal

Look to thy wants, and send thee satisfied—
Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen!"

And many another suppliant crying came
With noise of ravage wrought by beast and man,
And evermore a knight would ride away.

Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily
Down on the shoulders of the twain, his men,
Approach'd between them toward the King, and ask'd,
"A boon, Sir King,"—his voice was all ashamed,—
"For see ye not how weak and hunger-worn
I seem—leaning on these? grant me to serve
For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knaves
A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name.
Hereafter I will fight."

To him the King:
"A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon!
But so thou wilt no goodlier, then must Kay,
The master of the meats and drinks, be thine."

He rose and past; then Kay, a man of mien
Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself
Root-bitten by white lichen:

"Lo ye now!
This fellow hath broken from some abbey, where,
God wot, he had not beef and brewis enow,
However that might chance! but an he work,
Like any pigeon will I cram his crop,
And sleeker shall he shine than any hog."

Then Lancelot standing near: "Sir Seneschal,
Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray, and all the hounds;
A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know:
Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,
High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands
Large, fair, and fine!—Some young lad's mystery—
But, or from sheepcot or king's hall, the boy
Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace,
Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him."

Then Kay: "What murmurest thou of mystery?
Think ye this fellow will poison the King's dish?
Nay, for he spake too fool-like: mystery!
Tut, and the lad were noble, he had ask'd
For horse and armor: fair and fine, forsooth!
Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it
That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day
Undo thee not—and leave my man to me."

So Gareth all for glory underwent
The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage,
Ate with young lads his portion by the door,
And couch'd at night with grimy kitchen-knaves.
And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly,
But Kay the seneschal, who loved him not,
Would hustle and harry him, and labor him
Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set
To turn the broach, draw water, or hew wood,
Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bow'd himself
With all obedience to the King, and wrought
All kind of service with a noble ease

That graced the lowliest act in doing it.
And when the thralls had talk among themselves,
And one would praise the love that linkt the King
And Lancelot—how the King had saved his life
In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's—
For Lancelot was first in the tournament,
But Arthur mightiest on the battle-field—
Gareth was glad. Or if some other told
How once the wandering forester at dawn,
Far over the blue tarns and hazy seas,
On Caer-Eryri's highest found the King,
A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake,
"He passes to the Isle Avilion,
He passes and is heal'd and cannot die"—
Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul,
Then would he whistle rapid as any lark,
Or carol some old roundelay, and so loud
That first they mock'd, but, after, reverenced him.
Or Gareth, telling some prodigious tale
Of knights who sliced a red life-bubbling way
Thro' twenty folds of twisted dragon, held
All in a gap-mouth'd circle his good mates
Lying or sitting round him, idle hands,
Charm'd; till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come
Blustering upon them, like a sudden wind
Among dead leaves, and drive them all apart.
Or when the thralls had sport among themselves,
So there were any trial of mastery,
He, by two yards in casting bar or stone,
Was counted best; and if there chanced a joust,

490 *Caer-Eryri*—Mt. Snowdon, *highest in Wales.*

So that Sir Kay nodded him leave to go,
Would hurry thither, and when he saw the knights
Clash like the coming and retiring wave,
And the spear spring, and good horse reel, the boy
Was half beyond himself for ecstasy.

So for a month he wrought among the thralls;
But in the weeks that follow'd, the good Queen,
Repentant of the word she made him swear,
And saddening in her childless castle, sent,
Between the in-crescent and de-crescent moon,
Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow.

This, Gareth hearing from a squire of Lot
With whom he used to play at tourney once,
When both were children, and in lonely haunts
Would scratch a ragged oval on the sand,
And each at either dash from either end—
Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy.
He laugh'd; he sprang. "Out of the smoke, at once
I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee—
These news be mine, none other's—nay, the King's—
Descend into the city:" whereon he sought
The King alone, and found, and told him all.

"I have stagger'd thy strong Gawain in a tilt
For pastime; yea, he said it: joust can I.
Make me thy knight—in secret! let my name
Be hidden, and give me the first quest, I spring
Like flame from ashes."

Here the King's calm eye
Fell on, and check'd, and made him flush, and bow
Lowly, to kiss his hand, who answer'd him:
"Son, the good mother let me know thee here,
And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine.
Make thee my knight? my knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King."

Then Gareth, lightly springing from his knees:
"My King, for hardihood I can promise thee.
For uttermost obedience make demand
Of whom ye gave me to, the Seneschal,
No mellow master of the meats and drinks!
And as for love, God wot, I love not yet,
But love I shall, God willing."

And the King:
"Make thee my knight in secret? yea, but he,
Our noblest brother, and our truest man,
And one with me in all, he needs must know."

"Let Lancelot know, my King, let Lancelot know,
Thy noblest and thy truest!"

And the King:
"But wherefore would ye men should wonder at you?
Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King,
And the deed's sake my knighthood to the deed,
Than to be noised of."

Merrily Gareth ask'd:
"Have I not earn'd my cake in baking of it?
Let be my name until I make my name!
My deeds will speak: it is but for a day."
So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm
Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly
Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him.
Then, after summoning Lancelot privily:
"I have given him the first quest: he is not proven.
Look therefore, when he calls for this in hall,
Thou get to horse and follow him far away.
Cover the lions on thy shield, and see,
Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain."

Then that same day there past into the hall
A damsel of high lineage, and a brow
May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom,
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower:
She into hall past with her page and cried:

"O King, for thou hast driven the foe without,
See to the foe within! bridge, ford, beset
By bandits, every one that owns a tower
The lord for half a league. Why sit ye there?
Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king,
Till even the lonest hold were all as free
From cursed bloodshed as thine altar-cloth
From that best blood it is a sin to spill."

May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom—*In England the beautiful white hawthorn that blossoms in May is known as the May-blossom. What color is the apple-blossom?*

"Comfort thyself," said Arthur, "I nor mine
Rest: so my knighthood keep the vows they swore,
The wasted moorland of our realm shall be
Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall.
What is thy name? thy need?"

"My name?" she said—
"Lynette, my name; noble; my need, a knight
To combat for my sister, Lyonors,
A lady of high lineage, of great lands,
And comely, yea, and comelier than myself.
She lives in Castle Perilous: a river
Runs in three loops about her living-place;
And o'er it are three passings, and three knights
Defend the passings, brethren, and a fourth,
And of that four the mightiest, holds her stay'd
In her own castle, and so besieges her
To break her will, and make her wed with him;
And but delays his purport till thou send
To do the battle with him thy chief man
Sir Lancelot, whom he trusts to overthrow;
Then wed, with glory: but she will not wed
Save whom she loveth, or a holy life.
Now therefore have I come for Lancelot."

Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth ask'd:
"Damsel, ye know this Order lives to crush
All wrongers of the realm. But say, these four,
Who be they? What the fashion of the men?"

"They be of foolish fashion, O Sir King,
The fashion of that old knight-errantry

Who ride abroad, and do but what they will;
Courteous or bestial from the moment, such
As have nor law nor king; and three of these
Proud in their fantasy call themselves the Day,
Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star,
Being strong fools; and never a whit more wise
The fourth, who alway rideth arm'd in black,
A huge man-beast of boundless savagery.
He names himself the Night and oftener Death,
And wears a helmet mounted with a skull,
And bears a skeleton figured on his arms,
To show that who may slay or scape the three,
Slain by himself, shall enter endless night.
And all these four be fools, but mighty men,
And therefore am I come for Lancelot."

Hereat Sir Gareth call'd from where he rose,
A head with kindling eyes above the throng,
"A boon, Sir King—this quest!" then—for he mark'd
Kay near him groaning like a wounded bull—
"Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I,
And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I,
And I can topple over a hundred such.
Thy promise, King," and Arthur glancing at him,
Brought down a momentary brow. "Rough, sudden,
And pardonable, worthy to be knight—
Go therefore," and all hearers were amazed.

But on the damsel's forehead shame, pride, wrath
Slew the may-white: she lifted either arm,

619 *Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star—Youth, Middle Age, and Old Age.*

642 *Slew the may-white—Her face flushed in anger.*

"Fie on thee, King! I ask'd for thy chief knight,
And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave."
Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turn'd,
Fled down the lane of access to the King,
Took horse, descended the slope street, and past
The weird white gate, and paused without, beside
The field of tourney, murmuring "kitchen-knave!"

Now two great entries open'd from the hall,
At one end one that gave upon a range
Of level pavement where the King would pace
At sunrise, gazing over plain and wood;
And down from this a lordly stairway sloped
Till lost in blowing trees and tops of towers;
And out by this main doorway past the King.
But one was counter to the hearth, and rose
High that the highest-crested helm could ride
Therethro' nor graze; and by this entry fled
The damsel in her wrath, and on to this
Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door
King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town,
A war-horse of the best, and near it stood
The two that out of north had follow'd him.
This bare a maiden shield, a casque; that held
The horse, the spear; whereat Sir Gareth loosed
A cloak that dropt from collar-bone to heel,
A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down,
And from it, like a fuel-smother'd fire
That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flash'd as those
Dull-coated things, that making slide apart

[67] *Dull-coated things*—*Fireflies or dragon flies.*

Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns
A jewell'd harness, ere they pass and fly.
So Gareth ere he parted flash'd in arms.
Then as he donn'd the helm, and took the shield
And mounted horse and graspt a spear, of grain
Storm-strengthen'd on a windy site, and tipt
With trenchant steel, around him slowly prest
The people, while from out of kitchen came
The thralls in throng, and seeing who had work'd
Lustier than any, and whom they could but love,
Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried,
"God bless the King, and all his fellowship!"
And on thro' lanes of shouting Gareth rode
Down the slope street, and past without the gate.

So Gareth past with joy; but as the cur
Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause
Be cool'd by fighting, fellows, being named,
His owner, but remembers all, and growls
Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the door
Mutter'd in scorn of Gareth whom he used
To harry and hustle.

"Bound upon a quest
With horse and arms—the King hath past his time—
My scullion knave! Thralls, to your work again,
For an your fire be low ye kindle mine!
Will there be dawn in West and eve in East?
Begone!—my knave!—belike and like enow
Some old head-blow not heeded in his youth
So shook his wits they wander in his prime—

Crazed! How the villain lifted up his voice,
Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave!
Tut, he was tame and meek enow with me,
Till peacock'd up with Lancelot's noticing.
Well—I will after my loud knave, and learn
Whether he know me for his master yet.
Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance
Hold, by God's grace, he shall into the mire—
Thence, if the King awaken from his craze,
Into the smoke again."

But Lancelot said:
"Kay, wherefore wilt thou go against the King,
For that did never he whereon ye rail,
But ever meekly served the King in thee?
Abide: take counsel; for this lad is great
And lusty, and knowing both of lance and sword."
"Tut, tell not me," said Kay, "ye are overfine
To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies:"
Then mounted, on thro' silent faces rode
Down the slope city, and out beyond the gate.

But by the field of tourney lingering yet
Mutter'd the damsel: "Wherefore did the King
Scorn me? for, were Sir Lancelot lackt, at least
He might have yielded to me one of those
Who tilt for lady's love and glory here,
Rather than—O sweet heaven! O fie upon him!—
His kitchen-knave."

To whom Sir Gareth drew—
And there were none but few goodlier than he—

Shining in arms, "Damsel, the quest is mine.
Lead, and I follow." She thereat, as one
That smells a foul-flesh'd agaric in the holt,
And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,
Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose
With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, "Hence!
Avoid, thou smellest all of kitchen-grease.
And look who comes behind;" for there was Kay.
"Knowest thou not me? thy master? I am Kay.
We lack thee by the hearth."

And Gareth to him,
"Master no more! too well I know thee, ay—
The most ungentle knight in Arthur's hall."
"Have at thee then," said Kay: they shock'd, and Kay
Fell shoulder-slipt, and Gareth cried again,
"Lead, and I follow," and fast away she fled.

But after sod and shingle ceased to fly
Behind her, and the heart of her good horse
Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,
Perforce she stay'd, and overtaken spoke:

"What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship?
Deem'st thou that I accept thee aught the more
Or love thee better, that by some device
Full cowardly, or by mere unhappiness,
Thou hast overthrown and slain thy master—thou!—
Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon!—to me
Thou smellest all of kitchen as before."

[740] *Shoulder-slipt. His shoulder was dislocated.*

"Damsel," Sir Gareth answer'd gently, "say
Whate'er ye will, but whatsoe'er ye say,
I leave not till I finish this fair quest,
Or die therefore."

"Ay, wilt thou finish it?
Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks!
The listening rogue hath caught the manner of it.
But, knave, anon thou shalt be met with, knave,
And then by such a one that thou for all
The kitchen brewis that was ever supt
Shalt not once dare to look him in the face."

"I shall assay," said Gareth with a smile
That madden'd her, and away she flash'd again
Down the long avenues of a boundless wood,
And Gareth following was again beknaved:

"Sir Kitchen-knave, I have miss'd the only way
Where Arthur's men are set along the wood;
The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves:
If both be slain, I am rid of thee; but yet,
Sir Scullion, canst thou use that spit of thine?
Fight, an thou canst: I have miss'd the only way."

So till the dusk that follow'd evensong
Rode on the two, reviler and reviled;
Then after one long slope was mounted, saw,
Bowl-shaped, thro' tops of many thousand pines
A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink
To westward—in the deeps whereof a mere,
Round as the red eye of an eagle-owl,

Under the half-dead sunset glared; and shouts
Ascended, and there brake a servingman
Flying from out of the black wood, and crying,
"They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere."
Then Gareth, "Bound am I to right the wrong'd,
But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee."
And when the damsel spake contemptuously,
"Lead, and I follow," Gareth cried again,
"Follow, I lead!" so down among the pines
He plunged; and there, black-shadow'd nigh the mere,
And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and reed,
Saw six tall men haling a seventh along,
A stone about his neck to drown him in it.
Three with good blows he quieted, but three
Fled thro' the pines; and Gareth loosed the stone
From off his neck, then in the mere beside
Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere.
Last, Gareth loosed his bonds and on free feet
Set him, a stalwart baron, Arthur's friend.

"Well that ye came, or else these caitiff rogues
Had wreak'd themselves on me; good cause is theirs
To hate me, for my wont hath ever been
To catch my thief, and then like vermin here
Drown him, and with a stone about his neck;
And under this wan water many of them
Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone,
And rise, and flickering in a grimly light
Dance on the mere. Good now, ye have saved a life
Worth somewhat as the cleanser of this wood.
And fain would I reward thee worshipfully.
What guerdon will ye?"

Gareth sharply spake:
"None! for the deed's sake have I done the deed,
In uttermost obedience to the King.
But wilt thou yield this damsel harborage?"

Whereat the baron saying, "I well believe
You be of Arthur's Table," a light laugh
Broke from Lynette: "Ay, truly of a truth,
And in a sort, being Arthur's kitchen-knave!—
But deem not I accept thee aught the more,
Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit
Down on a rout of craven foresters.
A thresher with his flail had scatter'd them.
Nay—for thou smellest of the kitchen still.
But an this lord will yield us harborage,
Well."

So she spake. A league beyond the wood,
All in a full-fair manor and a rich,
His towers, where that day a feast had been
Held in high hall, and many a viand left,
And many a costly cate, received the three.
And there they placed a peacock in his pride
Before the damsel, and the baron set
Gareth beside her, but at once she rose.
"Meseems, that here is much discourtesy,
Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side.
Hear me—this morn I stood in Arthur's hall,
And pray'd the King would grant me Lancelot
To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night—
The last a monster unsubduable

Of any save of him for whom I call'd—
Suddenly bawls this frontless kitchen-knave,
'The quest is mine; thy kitchen-knave am I,
And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I.'
Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies,
'Go therefore,' and so gives the quest to him—
Him—here—a villain fitter to stick swine
Than ride abroad redressing women's wrong,
Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman."

Then half-ashamed and part-amazed, the lord
Now look'd at one and now at other, left
The damsel by the peacock in his pride,
And, seating Gareth at another board,
Sat down beside him, ate and then began:

"Friend, whether thou be kitchen-knave, or not,
Or whether it be the maiden's fantasy,
And whether she be mad, or else the King,
Or both or neither, or thyself be mad,
I ask not: but thou strikest a strong stroke,
For strong thou art and goodly therewithal,
And saver of my life; and therefore now,
For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh
Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back
To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.
Thy pardon; I but speak for thine avail,
The saver of my life."

And Gareth said,
"Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,
Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell."

So when, next morn, the lord whose life he saved
Had, some brief space, convey'd them on their way
And left them with God-speed, Sir Gareth spake,
"Lead, and I follow." Haughtily she replied:

"I fly no more: I allow thee for an hour.
Lion and stoat have isled together, knave,
In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks
Some ruth is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool?
For hard by here is one will overthrow
And slay thee; then will I to court again,
And shame the King for only yielding me
My champion from the ashes of his hearth."

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd courteously:
"Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.
Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find
My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay
Among the ashes and wedded the King's son."

Then to the shore of one of those long loops
Wherethro' the serpent river coil'd, they came.
Rough-thicketed were the banks and steep; the stream
Full, narrow; this a bridge of single arc
Took at a leap; and on the further side
Arose a silk pavilion, gay with gold
In streaks and rays, and all Lent-lily in hue,
Save that the dome was purple, and above,
Crimson, a slender banneret fluttering.

881–2 *Hers who lay among the ashes—Cinderella.*

889 *Lent-lily. The golden daffodil that blooms during Lent.*

And therebefore the lawless warrior paced
Unarm'd, and calling, "Damsel, is this he,
The champion thou hast brought from Arthur's hall?
For whom we let thee pass." "Nay, nay," she said,
"Sir Morning-Star. The King in utter scorn
Of thee and thy much folly hath sent thee here
His kitchen-knave: and look thou to thyself:
See that he fall not on thee suddenly,
And slay thee unarm'd; he is not knight but knave."

Then at his call, "O daughters of the Dawn,
And servants of the Morning-Star, approach,
Arm me," from out the silken curtain-folds
Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls
In gilt and rosy raiment came: their feet
In dewy grasses glisten'd; and the hair
All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem
Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.
These arm'd him in blue arms, and gave a shield
Blue also, and thereon the morning star.
And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,
Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,
Glorying; and in the stream beneath him shone,
Immingled with Heaven's azure waveringly,
The gay pavilion and the naked feet,
His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star.

Then she that watch'd him: "Wherefore stare ye so?
Thou shakest in thy fear: there yet is time:
Flee down the valley before he get to horse.
Who will cry shame? Thou art not knight but knave."

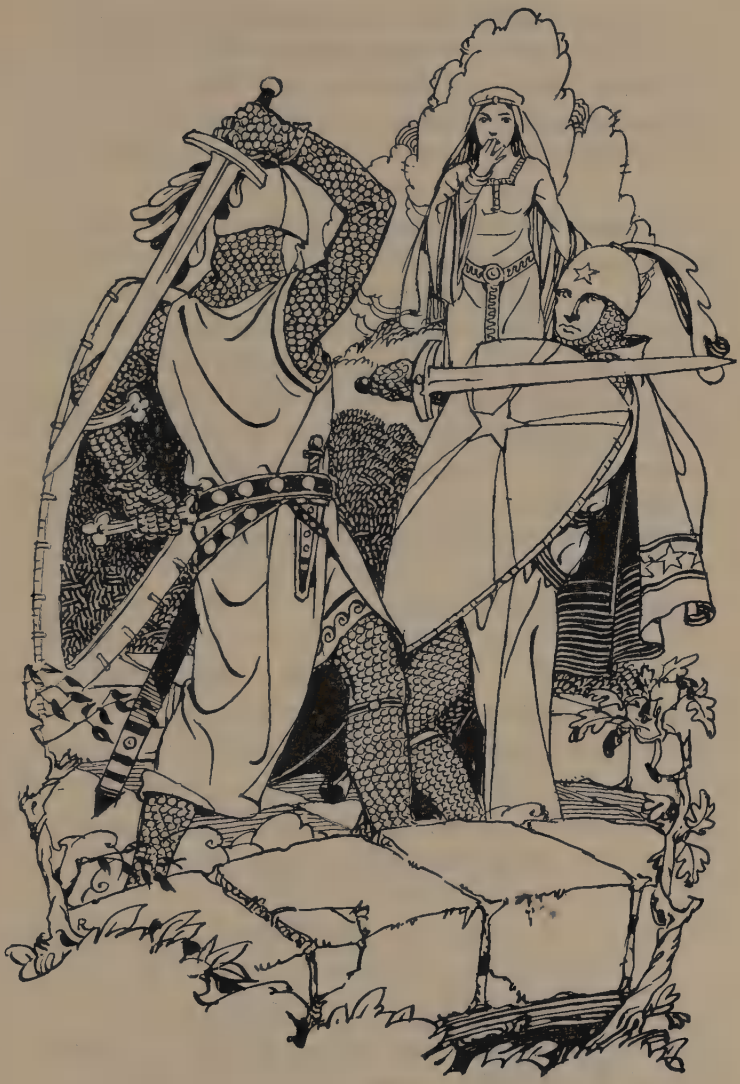
Said Gareth: "Damsel, whether knave or knight,
Far liefer had I fight a score of times
Than hear thee so missay me and revile.
Fair words were best for him who fights for thee;
But truly foul are better, for they send
That strength of anger thro' mine arms, I know
That I shall overthrow him."

And he that bore
The star, when mounted, cried from o'er the bridge:
"A kitchen-knave, and sent in scorn of me!
Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn.
For this were shame to do him further wrong
Than set him on his feet, and take his horse
And arms, and so return him to the King.
Come, therefore, leave thy lady lightly, knave.
Avoid: for it beseemeth not a knave
To ride with such a lady."

"Dog, thou liest!
I spring from loftier lineage than thine own."
He spake; and all at fiery speed the two
Shock'd on the central bridge, and either spear
Bent but not brake, and either knight at once,
Hurl'd as a stone from out of a catapult
Beyond his horse's crupper and the bridge,
Fell, as if dead; but quickly rose and drew,
And Gareth lash'd so fiercely with his brand
He drave his enemy backward down the bridge,
The damsel crying, "Well-stricken, kitchen-knave!"
Till Gareth's shield was cloven; but one stroke
Laid him that clove it grovelling on the ground.

Then cried the fallen, "Take not my life: I yield."
And Gareth, "So this damsel ask it of me
Good—I accord it easily as a grace."
She reddening, "Insolent scullion! I of thee?
I bound to thee for any favor ask'd!"
"Then shall he die." And Gareth there unlaced
His helmet as to slay him, but she shriek'd,
"Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay
One nobler than thyself." "Damsel, thy charge
Is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight,
Thy life is thine at her command. Arise
And quickly pass to Arthur's hall, and say
His kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou crave
His pardon for thy breaking of his laws.
Myself when I return will plead for thee.
Thy shield is mine—farewell; and, damsel, thou,
Lead, and I follow."

And fast away she fled;
Then when he came upon her, spake: "Methought,
Knave, when I watch'd thee striking on the bridge,
The savor of thy kitchen came upon me
A little faintlier: but the wind hath changed;
I scent it twenty-fold." And then she sang,
" 'O morning star'—not that tall felon there
Whom thou, by sorcery or unhappiness
Or some device, hast foully overthrown,—
'O morning star that smilest in the blue,
O star, my morning dream hath proven true,
Smile sweetly, thou! my love hath smiled on me.'



"But thou begone, take counsel, and away,
For hard by here is one that guards a ford—
The second brother in their fool's parable—
Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot.
Care not for shame: thou art not knight but knave."

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd, laughingly:
"Parables? Hear a parable of the knave.
When I was kitchen-knave among the rest,
Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates
Own'd a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat,
'Guard it,' and there was none to meddle with it.
And such a coat art thou, and thee the King
Gave me to guard, and such a dog am I,
To worry, and not to flee—and—knight or knave—
The knave that doth thee service as full knight
Is all as good, meseems, as any knight
Toward thy sister's freeing."

"Ay, Sir Knave!
Ay, knave, because thou strikest as a knight,
Being but knave, I hate thee all the more."

"Fair damsel, you should worship me the more,
That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies."

"Ay, ay," she said, "but thou shalt meet thy match."

So when they touch'd the second river-loop,
Huge on a huge red horse, and all in mail
Burnish'd to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun

Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower
That blows a globe of after arrowlets
Ten-thousand-fold had grown, flash'd the fierce shield,
All sun; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots
Before them when he turn'd from watching him.
He from beyond the roaring shallow roar'd,
"What doest thou, brother, in my marches here?"
And she athwart the shallow shrill'd again,
"Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall
Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms."
"Ugh!" cried the Sun, and vizoring up a red
And cipher face of rounded foolishness,
Push'd horse across the foamings of the ford,
Whom Gareth met mid-stream: no room was there
For lance or tourney-skill: four strokes they struck
With sword, and these were mighty; the new knight
Had fear he might be shamed; but as the Sun
Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth,
The hoof of his horse slipt in the stream, the stream
Descended, and the Sun was wash'd away.

Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford;
So drew him home; but he that fought no more,
As being all bone-batter'd on the rock,
Yielded; and Gareth sent him to the King.
"Myself when I return will plead for thee.
Lead, and I follow." Quietly she led.
"Hath not the good wind, damsel, changed again?"
"Nay, not a point; nor art thou victor here.

1002–3 *The flower that blows a globe of after arrowlets—Note Tennyson's poetic description of the dandelion.*

There lies a ridge of slate across the ford;
His horse thereon stumbled—ay, for I saw it.

" 'O sun'—not this strong fool whom thou, Sir Knave,
Hast overthrown thro' mere unhappiness—
'O sun, that wakenest all to bliss or pain,
O moon, that layest all to sleep again,
Shine sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of love-song or of love?
Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born,
Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance,—

" 'O dewy flowers that open to the sun,
O dewy flowers that close when day is done,
Blow sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of flowers, except, belike,
To garnish meats with? hath not our good King
Who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom,
A foolish love for flowers? what stick ye round
The pasty? wherewithal deck the boar's head?
Flowers? nay, the boar hath rosemaries and bay.

" 'O birds that warble to the morning sky,
O birds that warble as the day goes by,
Sing sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis, merle,
Linnet? what dream ye when they utter forth
May-music growing with the growing light,
Their sweet sun-worship? these be for the snare—

So runs thy fancy—these be for the spit,
Larding and basting. See thou have not now
Larded thy last, except thou turn and fly.
There stands the third fool of their allegory."

For there beyond a bridge of treble bow,
All in a rose-red from the west, and all
Naked it seem'd, and glowing in the broad
Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight
That named himself the Star of Evening stood.

And Gareth, "Wherefore waits the madman there
Naked in open dayshine?" "Nay," she cried,
"Not naked, only wrapt in harden'd skins
That fit him like his own; and so ye cleave
His armor off him, these will turn the blade."

Then the third brother shouted o'er the bridge,
"O brother-star, why shine ye here so low?
Thy ward is higher up: but have ye slain
The damsel's champion?" and the damsel cried:

"No star of thine, but shot from Arthur's heaven
With all disaster unto thine and thee!
For both thy younger brethren have gone down
Before this youth; and so wilt thou, Sir Star;
Art thou not old?"

"Old, damsel, old and hard,
Old, with the might and breath of twenty boys."

1067 *Wrapt in harden'd skins—Acquired bad habits.*

Said Gareth, "Old, and over-bold in brag!
But that same strength which threw the Morning Star
Can throw the Evening."

Then that other blew
A hard and deadly note upon the horn.
"Approach and arm me!" With slow steps from out
An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stain'd
Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came,
And arm'd him in old arms, and brought a helm
With but a drying evergreen for crest,
And gave a shield whereon the star of even
Half-tarnish'd and half-bright, his emblem, shone.
But when it glitter'd o'er the saddle-bow,
They madly hurl'd together on the bridge;
And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew,
There met him drawn, and overthrew him again,
But up like fire he started: and as oft
As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,
So many a time he vaulted up again;
Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,
Foredooming all his trouble was in vain,
Labor'd within him, for he seem'd as one
That all in later, sadder age begins
To war against ill uses of a life,
But these from all his life arise, and cry,
"Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down!"
He half despairs; so Gareth seem'd to strike
Vainly, the damsel clamoring all the while,
"Well done, knave-knight, well stricken, O good knight-
knave—
O knave, as noble as any of all the knights—

Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied—
Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round—
His arms are old, he trusts the harden'd skin—
Strike—strike—the wind will never change again."
And Gareth hearing ever stronglier smote,
And hew'd great pieces of his armor off him,
But lash'd in vain against the harden'd skin,
And could not wholly bring him under, more
Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge,
The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs
For ever; till at length Sir Gareth's brand
Clash'd his, and brake it utterly to the hilt.
"I have thee now"; but forth that other sprang,
And, all unknightlike, writhed his wiry arms
Around him, till he felt, despite his mail,
Strangled, but straining even his uttermost
Cast, and so hurl'd him headlong o'er the bridge
Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried,
"Lead, and I follow."

But the damsel said:
"I lead no longer; ride thou at my side;
Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves.

" 'O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain,
O rainbow with three colors after rain,
Shine sweetly: thrice my love hath smiled on me.'

"Sir,—and, good faith, I fain had added—Knight,
But that I heard thee call thyself a knave,—
Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled,
Missaid thee; noble I am; and thought the King

Scorn'd me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend,
For thou hast ever answer'd courteously,
And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal
As any of Arthur's best, but, being knave,
Hast mazed my wit: I marvel what thou art."

"Damsel," he said, "you be not all to blame,
Saving that you mistrusted our good King
Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one
Not fit to cope your quest. You said your say;
Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth! I hold
He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet
To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets
His heart be stirr'd with any foolish heat
At any gentle damsel's waywardness.
Shamed? care not! thy foul sayings fought for me
And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks
There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self,
Hath force to quell me."

Nigh upon that hour
When the lone hern forgets his melancholy,
Lets down his other leg, and stretching dreams
Of goodly supper in the distant pool,
Then turn'd the noble damsel smiling at him,
And told him of a cavern hard at hand,
Where bread and baken meats and good red wine
Of Southland, which the Lady Lyonors
Had sent her coming champion, waited him.

Anon they past a narrow comb wherein
Were slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse

Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues.
"Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here,
Whose holy hand hath fashion'd on the rock
The war of Time against the soul of man.
And yon four fools have suck'd their allegory
From these damp walls, and taken but the form.
Know ye not these?" and Gareth lookt and read—
In letters like to those the vexillary
Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt—
"PHOSPHORUS," then "MERIDIES,"—"HESPERUS"—
"NOX"—"MORS," beneath five figures, armed men,
Slab after slab, their faces forward all,
And running down the Soul, a shape that fled
With broken wings, torn raiment, and loose hair,
For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.
"Follow the faces, and we find it. Look,
Who comes behind?"

For one—delay'd at first
Thro' helping back the dislocated Kay
To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced,
The damsel's headlong error thro' the wood—
Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-loops—
His blue shield-lions cover'd—softly drew
Behind the twain, and when he saw the star
Gleam, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried,
"Stay, felon knight, I avenge me for my friend."
And Gareth crying prick'd against the cry;

1174–5 *Phosphorous, etc.—Latin names for Morning Star, Noonday, Evening, Night, and Death.*

1177–9 *The Soul, a shape that fled, etc.—The Soul was trying to save itself by seeking religion in the hermit's cave.*

But when they closed—in a moment—at one touch
Of that skill'd spear, the wonder of the world—
Went sliding down so easily, and fell,
That when he found the grass within his hands
He laugh'd; the laughter jarr'd upon Lynette:
Harshly she ask'd him, "Shamed and overthrown,
And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave,
Why laugh ye? that ye blew your boast in vain?"
"Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son
Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent,
And victor of the bridges and the ford,
And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom
I know not, all thro' mere unhappiness—
Device and sorcery and unhappiness—
Out, sword; we are thrown!" And Lancelot answer'd:
"Prince,
O Gareth—thro' the mere unhappiness
Of one who came to help thee, not to harm,
Lancelot, and all as glad to find thee whole
As on the day when Arthur knighted him."

Then Gareth: "Thou—Lancelot!—thine the hand
That threw me? An some chance to mar the boast
Thy brethren of thee make—which could not chance—
Had sent thee down before a lesser spear,
Shamed had I been, and sad—O Lancelot—thou!"

Whereat the maiden, petulant: "Lancelot,
Why came ye not, when call'd? and wherefore now
Come ye, not call'd? I gloried in my knave,
Who being still rebuked would answer still
Courteous as any knight—but now, if knight,

The marvel dies, and leaves me fool'd and trick'd,
And only wondering wherefore play'd upon;
And doubtful whether I and mine be scorn'd.
Where should be truth if not in Arthur's hall,
In Arthur's presence? Knight, knave, prince and fool,
I hate thee and forever."



And Lancelot said:
"Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth! knight art thou
To the King's best wish. O damsel, be you wise,
To call him shamed who is but overthrown?
Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time.
Victor from vanquish'd issues at the last,
And overthrower from being overthrown.
With sword we have not striven; and thy good horse
And thou are weary; yet not less I felt
Thy manhood thro' that wearied lance of thine.

Well hast thou done; for all the stream is freed,
And thou hast wreak'd his justice on his foes,
And when reviled hast answer'd graciously,
And makest merry when overthrown. Prince, knight,
Hail, knight and prince, and of our Table Round!"

And then when turning to Lynette he told
The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said:
"Ay, well—ay, well—for worse than being fool'd
Of others, is to fool one's self. A cave,
Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks
And forage for the horse, and flint for fire.
But all about it flies a honeysuckle.
Seek, till we find." And when they sought and found,
Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life
Past into sleep; on whom the maiden gazed:
"Sound sleep be thine! sound cause to sleep hast thou.
Wake lusty! Seem I not as tender to him
As any mother? Ay, but such a one
As all day long hath rated at her child,
And vext his day, but blesses him asleep—
Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle
In the hush'd night, as if the world were one
Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness!
O Lancelot, Lancelot,"—and she clapt her hands—
"Full merry am I to find my goodly knave
Is knight and noble. See now, sworn have I,
Else yon black felon had not let me pass,
To bring thee back to do the battle with him.
Thus an thou goest, he will fight thee first;
Who doubts thee victor? so will my knight-knave
Miss the full flower of this accomplishment."

Said Lancelot: "Peradventure he you name
May know my shield. Let Gareth, and he will,
Change his for mine, and take my charger, fresh,
Not to be spurr'd, loving the battle as well
As he that rides him." "Lancelot-like," she said,
"Courteous in this, Lord Lancelot, as in all."

And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutch'd the shield:
"Ramp, ye lance-splintering lions, on whom all spears
Are rotten sticks! ye seem agape to roar!
Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord!—
Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you.
O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these
Streams virtue—fire—thro' one that will not shame
Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield.
Hence: let us go."

Silent the silent field
They traversed. Arthur's Harp tho' summer-wan,
In counter motion to the clouds, allured
The glance of Gareth dreaming on his liege.
A star shot: "Lo," said Gareth, "the foe falls!"
An owl whoopt: "Hark the victor pealing there!"
Suddenly she that rode upon his left
Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him, crying:
"Yield, yield him this again; 'tis he must fight:
I curse the tongue that all thro' yesterday
Reviled thee, and hath wrought on Lancelot now
To lend thee horse and shield: wonders ye have done;
Miracles ye cannot: here is glory enow
In having flung the three: I see thee maim'd,
Mangled: I swear thou canst not fling the fourth."

"And wherefore, damsel? tell me all ye know.
You cannot scare me; nor rough face, or voice,
Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery
Appal me from the quest."

"Nay, prince," she cried,
"God wot, I never look'd upon the face,
Seeing he never rides abroad by day;
But watch'd him have I like a phantom pass
Chilling the night: nor have I heard the voice.
Always he made his mouthpiece of a page
Who came and went, and still reported him
As closing in himself the strength of ten,
And when his anger tare him, massacring
Man, woman, lad, and girl—yea, the soft babe!
Some hold that he hath swallow'd infant flesh,
Monster! O prince, I went for Lancelot first,
The quest is Lancelot's: give him back the shield."

Said Gareth laughing, "An he fight for this,
Belike he wins it as the better man:
Thus—and not else!"

But Lancelot on him urged
All the devisings of their chivalry
When one might meet a mightier than himself;
How best to manage horse, lance, sword, and shield,
And so fill up the gap where force might fail
With skill and fineness. Instant were his words.

Then Gareth: "Here be rules. I know but one—
To dash against mine enemy and to win.

Yet have I watch'd thee victor in the joust,
And seen thy way." "Heaven help thee!" sigh'd
Lynette.

Then for a space, and under cloud that grew
To thunder-gloom palling all stars, they rode
In converse till she made her palfrey halt,
Lifted an arm, and softly whisper'd, "There."
And all the three were silent seeing, pitch'd
Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field,
A huge pavilion like a mountain peak
Sunder the glooming crimson on the marge,
Black, with black banner, and a long black horn
Beside it hanging; which Sir Gareth graspt,
And so, before the two could hinder him,
Sent all his heart and breath thro' all the horn.
Echo'd the walls; a light twinkled; anon
Came lights and lights, and once again he blew;
Whereon were hollow tramplings up and down
And muffled voices heard, and shadows past;
Till high above him, circled with her maids,
The Lady Lyonors at a window stood,
Beautiful among lights, and waving to him
White hands and courtesy; but when the prince
Three times had blown—after long hush—at last—
The huge pavilion slowly yielded up,
Thro' those black foldings, that which housed therein.
High on a night-black horse, in night-black arms,
With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death,
And crown'd with fleshless laughter—some ten steps—

[1348] *Crown'd with fleshless laughter—A grinning skull on top of his helmet.*

In the half-light—thro' the dim dawn—advanced
The monster, and then paused, and spake no word.

But Gareth spake and all indignantly:
"Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,
Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,
But must, to make the terror of thee more,
Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries
Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod,
Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers
As if for pity?" But he spake no word;
Which set the horror higher: a maiden swoon'd;
The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept,
As doom'd to be the bride of Night and Death;
Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm;
And even Sir Lancelot thro' his warm blood felt
Ice strike, and all that mark'd him were aghast.

At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neigh'd,
And Death's dark war-horse bounded forward with him.
Then those that did not blink the terror saw
That Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.
But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.
Half fell to right and half to left and lay.
Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm
As throughly as the skull; and out from this
Issued the bright face of a blooming boy
Fresh as a flower new-born, and crying, "Knight,
Slay me not: my three brethren bade me do it,
To make a horror all about the house,
And stay the world from Lady Lyonors;
They never dream'd the passes would be past."

Answer'd Sir Gareth graciously to one
Not many a moon his younger, "My fair child,
What madness made thee challenge the chief knight
Of Arthur's hall?" "Fair Sir, they bade me do it.
They hate the King and Lancelot, the King's friend;
They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream,
They never dream'd the passes could be past."

Then sprang the happier day from underground;
And Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance
And revel and song, made merry over Death,
As being after all their foolish fears
And horrors only proven a blooming boy.
So large mirth lived, and Gareth won the quest.

And he that told the tale in older times
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
But he that told it later says Lynette.

1392 *He that told the tale*—Sir Thomas Malory.
1394 *He that told it later*—Tennyson.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

The guilty love of Queen Guinevere and Arthur's first knight, Lancelot, has by this time become common gossip at the Court where it is known to almost everyone but the king. The knights of the Round Table are beginning to lose their moral virtues and their high ideals.

In this idyll of Lancelot and Elaine, Tennyson tells one of the most beautiful love stories ever written, contrasting the pure and radiant love of Elaine with the restless and jealous attachment of Guinevere.



LANCELOT AND ELAINE

ELAINE the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot:

Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam;
Then fearing rust or soilure fashion'd for it
A case of silk, and braided thereupon
All the devices blazon'd on the shield
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit,
A border fantasy of branch and flower,
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.
Not rested thus content, but day by day,
Leaving her household and good father, climb'd
That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door,
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,
Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,
Now made a pretty history to herself
Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,
And every scratch a lance had made upon it,
Conjecturing when and where: this cut is fresh;
That ten years back; this dealt him at Caerlyle;
That at Caerleon; this at Camelot:
And ah, God's mercy, what a stroke was there!
And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God
Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,
And saved him: so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield
Of Lancelot, she that knew not even his name?
He left it with her, when he rode to tilt
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,
Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur, long before they crown'd him King,

Roving the trackless realms of Lyonnesse,[35]
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave
Like its own mists to all the mountain side:
For here two brothers, one a king, had met
And fought together; but their names were lost;
And each had slain his brother at a blow;
And down they fell and made the glen abhorr'd:
And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd,
And lichen'd into color with the crags:
And he that once was king had on a crown
Of diamonds, one in front and four aside.
And Arthur came, and laboring up the pass,
All in a misty moonshine, unawares
Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull
Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown
Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims
Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn:
And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,
And set it on his head, and in his heart
Heard murmurs, "Lo, thou likewise shalt be king."

Thereafter, when a king, he had the gems
Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his knights
Saying: "These jewels, whereupon I chanced
Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the King's—
For public use: henceforward let there be,
Once every year, a joust for one of these:
For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn

[35] *Lyonnesse—This mythical land is supposed to have extended from Cornwall in southwestern England to the Scilly Islands and now lies submerged beneath the waters of the Atlantic.*

Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow
In use of arms and manhood, till we drive
The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land
Hereafter, which God hinder!" Thus he spoke:
And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still
Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,
With purpose to present them to the Queen
When all were won; but, meaning all at once
To snare her royal fancy with a boon
Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last
And largest, Arthur, holding then his court
Hard on the river nigh the place which now
Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust
At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh
Spake—for she had been sick—to Guinevere:
"Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move
To these fair jousts?" "Yea, lord," she said, "ye know it."
"Then will ye miss," he answer'd, "the great deeds
Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,
A sight ye love to look on." And the Queen
Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly
On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.
He, thinking that he read her meaning there,
"Stay with me, I am sick; my love is more
Than many diamonds," yielded; and a heart
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen—
However much he yearn'd to make complete
The tale of diamonds for his destined boon—

75–6 *The place which now is this world's hugest—London.*

Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,
"Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,
And lets me from the saddle;" and the King
Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way.
No sooner gone than suddenly she began:

"To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame!
Why go ye not to these fair jousts? the knights
Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd
Will murmur, 'Lo the shameless ones, who take
Their pastime now the trustful King is gone!' "
Then Lancelot, vext at having lied in vain:
"Are ye so wise? ye were not once so wise,
My Queen, that summer when ye loved me first.
Then of the crowd ye took no more account
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,
And every voice is nothing. As to knights,
Them surely can I silence with all ease.
But now my loyal worship is allow'd
Of all men: many a bard, without offence,
Has link'd our names together in his lay,
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,
The pearl of beauty; and our knights at feast
Have pledged us in this union, while the King
Would listen smiling. How then? is there more?
Has Arthur spoken aught? or would yourself,
Now weary of my service and devoir,
Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord?"

[92] *Urged him to speak against the truth—This is the first time that the guilty Lancelot has lied to King Arthur. Telling a lie was a very serious sin for a knight whose honor rested on his word.*

She broke into a little scornful laugh:
"Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good lord—
But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven?
He never spake word of reproach to me,
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,
He cares not for me: only here to-day
There gleamed a vague suspicion in his eyes:
Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him—else
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible,
To make them like himself; but, friend, to me
He is all fault who hath no fault at all:
For who loves me must have a touch of earth;
The low sun makes the color: I am yours,
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond.
And therefore hear my words: go to the jousts:
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream
When sweetest; and the vermin voices here
May buzz so loud—we scorn them, but they sting."

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights:
"And with what face, after my pretext made,
Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I
Before a king who honors his own word
As if it were his God's?"

"Yea," said the Queen,
"A moral child without the craft to rule,
Else had he not lost me: but listen to me,
If I must find you wit: we hear it said
That men go down before your spear at a touch,

But knowing you are Lancelot; your great name,
This conquers: hide it therefore; go unknown:
Win! by this kiss you will: and our true King
Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,
As all for glory; for to speak him true,
Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,
No keener hunter after glory breathes.
He loves it in his knights more than himself;
They prove to him his work: win and return."

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,
Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known,
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,
Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,
And there among the solitary downs,
Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;
Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,
That all in loops and links among the dales
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw
Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.



Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn.
Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,
Who let him into lodging and disarm'd.
And Lancelot marvell'd at the wordless man;
And issuing found the Lord of Astolat
With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,
Moving to meet him in the castle court;
And close behind them stept the lily maid
Elaine, his daughter: mother of the house
There was not. Some light jest among them rose
With laughter dying down as the great knight
Approach'd them; then the Lord of Astolat:
"Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name
Livest between the lips? for by thy state
And presence I might guess thee chief of those,
After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.
Him have I seen: the rest, his Table Round,
Known as they are, to me they are unknown."

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights:
"Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known,
What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.
But since I go to joust as one unknown
At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not;
Hereafter ye shall know me—and the shield—
I pray you lend me one, if such you have,
Blank, or at least with some device not mine."

Then said the Lord of Astolat: "Here is Torre's:
Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre;
And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.

His ye can have." Then added plain Sir Torre,
"Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it."
Here laugh'd the father saying: "Fie, Sir Churl,
Is that an answer for a noble knight?
Allow him! but Lavaine, my younger here,
He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,
Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,
And set it in this damsel's golden hair,
To make her thrice as wilful as before."

"Nay, father, nay, good father, shame me not
Before this noble knight," said young Lavaine,
"For nothing. Surely I but play'd on Torre:
He seem'd so sullen, vext he could not go:
A jest, no more! for, knight, the maiden dreamt
That some one put this diamond in her hand,
And that it was too slippery to be held,
And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,
The castle-well, belike; and then I said
That *if* I went and *if* I fought and won it—
But all was jest and joke among ourselves—
Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.
But, father, give me leave, an if he will,
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight:
Win shall I not, but do my best to win;
Young as I am, yet would I do my best."

"So ye will grace me," answer'd Lancelot,
Smiling a moment, "with your fellowship
O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,
Then were I glad of you as guide and friend:

And you shall win this diamond,—as I hear,
It is a fair large diamond,—if ye may,
And yield it to this maiden, if ye will."
"A fair large diamond," added plain Sir Torre,
"Such be for queens, and not for simple maids."
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,
Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,
Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement
Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,
Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus return'd:
"If what is fair be but for what is fair,
And only queens are to be counted so,
Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid
Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,
Not violating the bond of like to like."

He spoke and ceased: the lily maid Elaine,
Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,
Lifted her eyes and read his lineaments.
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
In battle with the love he bare his lord,
Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.
Another sinning on such heights with one,
The flower of all the west and all the world,
Had been the sleeker for it; but in him
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
And drove him into wastes and solitudes
For agony, who was yet a living soul.
Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man
That ever among ladies ate in hall,
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.
However marr'd, of more than twice her years,

Seam'd with an ancient sword-cut on the cheek,
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes
And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

Then the great knight, the darling of the court,
Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall
Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain
Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,
But kindly man moving among his kind:
Whom they with meats and vintage of their best
And talk and minstrel melody entertain'd.
And much they ask'd of court and Table Round,
And ever well and readily answer'd he;
But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,
Suddenly speaking of the wordless man,
Heard from the baron that, ten years before,
The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.
"He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design
Against my house, and him they caught and maim'd;
But I, my sons, and little daughter fled
From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods
By the great river in a boatman's hut.
Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke
The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill."

"O there, great lord, doubtless," Lavaine said, rapt
By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth
Toward greatness in its elder, "you have fought.

[209] *Glanced at Guinevere*—Referred to the queen. (Note how Lancelot changes the subject when Guinevere's name is spoken.)

[279] *Badon hill*—This hill in Dorsetshire is where the Britons under Arthur overthrew the invading Saxons in 520 A.D.

O, tell us—for we live apart—you know
Of Arthur's glorious wars." And Lancelot spoke
And answer'd him at full, as having been
With Arthur in the fight which all day long
Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem;
And in the four loud battles by the shore
Of Duglas; that on Bassa; then the war
That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts
Of Celidon the forest; and again
By Castle Gurnion, where the glorious King
Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,[293]
Carved of one emerald centred in a sun
Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed;
And at Caerleon had he helped his lord,
When the strong neighings of the wild White Horse[297]
Set every gilded parapet shuddering;
And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,
And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit,
Where many a heathen fell; "and on the mount
Of Badon I myself beheld the King
Charge at the head of all his Table Round,
And all his legions crying Christ and him,
And break them; and I saw him, after, stand
High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume
Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,
And seeing me, with a great voice he cried,
'They are broken, they are broken!' for the King,
However mild he seems at home, nor cares
For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts—

[293] *Our Lady—The Holy Virgin Mary.*
[297] *The wild White Horse—Emblem of the heathen Saxon, led by Hengist.*

For if his own knight casts him down, he laughs,
Saying his knights are better men than he—
Yet in this heathen war the fire of God
Fills him: I never saw his like; there lives
No greater leader."

While he utter'd this,
Low to her own heart said the lily maid,
"Save your great self, fair lord"; and when he fell
From talk of war to traits of pleasantry—
Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind—
She still took note that when the living smile
Died from his lips, across him came a cloud
Of melancholy severe, from which again,
Whenever in her hovering to and fro
The lily maid had striven to make him cheer,
There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness
Of manners and of nature: and she thought
That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.
And all night long his face before her lived,
As when a painter, poring on a face,
Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
The shape and color of a mind and life,
Lives for his children, ever at its best
And fullest; so the face before her lived,
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep,
Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought
She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.
First as in fear, step after step, she stole
Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating:

Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,
"This shield, my friend, where is it?" and Lavaine
Past inward, as she came from out the tower.
There to his proud horse Lancelot turn'd, and smooth'd
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew
Nearer and stood. He look'd, and, more amazed
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw
The maiden standing in the dewy light.
He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood
Rapt on his face as if it were a god's.
Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire
That he should wear her favor at the tilt.
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.
"Fair lord, whose name I know not—noble it is,
I well believe, the noblest—will you wear
My favor at this tourney?" "Nay," said he,
"Fair lady, since I never yet have worn
Favor of any lady in the lists.
Such is my wont, as those who know me know."
"Yea, so," she answer'd; "then in wearing mine
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,
That those who know should know you." And he turn'd
Her counsel up and down within his mind,
And found it true, and answer'd: "True, my child.
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:
What is it?" and she told him, "A red sleeve
Broider'd with pearls," and brought it: then he bound
Her token on his helmet, with a smile
Saying, "I never yet have done so much

For any maiden living," and the blood
Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight;
But left her all the paler when Lavaine
Returning brought the yet-unblazon'd shield,
His brother's; which he gave to Lancelot,
Who parted with his own to fair Elaine:
"Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield
In keeping till I come." "A grace to me,"
She answer'd, "twice to-day. I am your squire!"
Whereat Lavaine said laughing: "Lily maid,
For fear our people call you lily maid
In earnest, let me bring your color back;
Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed":
So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,
And thus they moved away: she staid a minute,
Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there—
Her bright hair blown about the serious face
Yet rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss—
Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield
In silence, while she watch'd their arms far-off
Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.
Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield,
There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away
Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,
To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight
Not far from Camelot, now for forty years
A hermit, who had pray'd, labor'd and pray'd,
And ever laboring had scoop'd himself
In the white rock a chapel and a hall
On massive columns, like a shore-cliff cave,

And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry;
The green light from the meadows underneath
Struck up and lived along the milky roofs;
And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees
And poplars made a noise of falling showers.
And thither wending there that night they bode.

But when the next day broke from underground,
And shot red fire and shadows thro' the cave,
They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away.
Then Lancelot saying, "Hear, but hold my name
Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,"
Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant reverence,
Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,
But left him leave to stammer, "Is it indeed?"
And after muttering, "The great Lancelot,"
At last he got his breath and answer'd: "One,
One have I seen—that other, our liege lord,
The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings,
Of whom the people talk mysteriously,
He will be there—then were I stricken blind
That minute, I might say that I had seen."

So spake Lavaine, and when they reach'd the lists
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes
Run thro' the peopled gallery which half round
Lay like a rainbow fallen upon the grass,
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,

Pendragon—Supreme ruler (King Arthur).

And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,
And from the carven-work behind him crept
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found
The new design wherein they lost themselves,
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work:
And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.

Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said:
"Me you call great: mine is the firmer seat,
The truer lance: but there is many a youth
Now crescent, who will come to all I am
And overcome it; and in me there dwells
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
Of greatness to know well I am not great:
There is the man." And Lavaine gaped upon him
As on a thing miraculous, and anon
The trumpets blew; and then did either side,
They that assail'd, and they that held the lists,
Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,
Meet in the midst, and there so furiously
Shock that a man far-off might well perceive,
If any man that day were left afield,
The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.
And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw
Which were the weaker; then he hurl'd into it
Against the stronger: little need to speak
Of Lancelot in his glory! King, duke, earl,
Count, baron—whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,
Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight
Should do and almost overdo the deeds
Of Lancelot; and one said to the other, "Lo!
What is he? I do not mean the force alone—
The grace and versatility of the man!
Is it not Lancelot?" "When has Lancelot worn
Favor of any lady in the lists?
Not such his wont, as we that know him know."
"How then? who then?" a fury seized them all,
A fiery family passion for the name
Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.
They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds, and thus,
Their plumes driven backward by the wind they made
In moving, all together down upon him
Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North Sea,
Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
Down on a bark, and overbears the bark
And him that helms it; so they overbore
Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear
Down-glancing lamed the charger, and a spear
Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head
Pierced thro' his side, and there snapt and remain'd.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully:
He bore a knight of old repute to the earth,
And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.
He up the side, sweating with agony, got,
But thought to do while he might yet endure,

And being lustily holpen by the rest,
His party,—tho' it seem'd half-miracle
To those he fought with,—drave his kith and kin,
And all the Table Round that held the lists,
Back to the barrier; then the trumpets blew
Proclaiming his the prize who wore the sleeve
Of scarlet and the pearls; and all the knights,
His party, cried, "Advance and take thy prize
The diamond"; but he answer'd: "Diamond me
No diamonds! for God's love, a little air!
Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death!
Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not."

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field
With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.
There from his charger down he slid, and sat,
Gasping to Sir Lavaine, "Draw the lance-head,"
"Ah, my sweet lord Sir Lancelot," said Lavaine,
"I dread me, if I draw it, you will die."
But he, "I die already with it: draw—
Draw,"—and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave
A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,
And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank
For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.
Then came the hermit out and bare him in,
There stanch'd his wound; and there, in daily doubt
Whether to live or die, for many a week
Hid from the wild world's rumor by the grove
Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,
And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,

His party, knights of utmost North and West,
Lords of waste marshes, kings of desolate isles,
Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,
"Lo, Sire, our knight, thro' whom we won the day,
Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize
Untaken, crying that his prize is death."
"Heaven hinder," said the King, "that such an one,
So great a knight as we have seen to-day—
He seem'd to me another Lancelot—
Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot—
He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore rise,
O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight.
Wounded and wearied, needs must he be near.
I charge you that you get at once to horse.
And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you
Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given:
His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him
No customary honor: since the knight
Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,
Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take
This diamond, and deliver it, and return,
And bring us where he is, and how he fares,
And cease not from your quest until ye find."

So saying, from the carven flower above,
To which it made a restless heart, he took
And gave the diamond: then from where he sat
At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose,
With smiling face and frowning heart, a prince
In the mid might and flourish of his May,
Gawain, surnamed the Courteous, fair and strong,
And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint,

And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal
Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,
Nor often loyal to his word, and now
Wroth that the King's command to sally forth
In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave
The banquet and concourse of knights and kings.

So all in wrath he got to horse and went;
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,
Past, thinking, "Is it Lancelot who hath come
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain
Of glory, and hath added wound to wound,
And ridden away to die?" So fear'd the King,
And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing ask'd,
"Love, are you yet so sick?" "Nay, lord," she said.
"And where is Lancelot?" Then the Queen amazed,
"Was he not with you? won he not your prize?"
"Nay, but one like him." "Why, that like was he."
And when the King demanded how she knew,
Said: "Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk
That men went down before his spear at a touch,
But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name
Conquer'd; and therefore would he hide his name
From all men, even the King, and to this end
Had made the pretext of a hindering wound,
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn
If his old prowess were in aught decay'd;
And added, 'Our true Arthur, when he learns,
Will well allow my pretext, as for gain
Of purer glory.' "

Then replied the King:
"Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,
To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee.
Surely his King and most familiar friend
Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed,
Albeit I know my knights fantastical,
So fine a fear in our large Lancelot
Must needs have moved my laughter: now remains
But little cause for laughter: his own kin—
Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this!—
His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him;
So that he went sore wounded from the field.
Yet good news too; for goodly hopes are mine
That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.
He wore, against his wont, upon his helm
A sleeve of scarlet, broider'd with great pearls,
Some gentle maiden's gift."

"Yea, lord," she said,
"Thy hopes are mine," and saying that, she choked,
And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,
Past to her chamber, and there flung herself
Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,
And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,
And shriek'd out "Traitor!" to the unhearing wall,
Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,
And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

Gawain the while thro' all the region round
Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,
Touch'd at all points except the poplar grove,

And came at last, tho' late, to Astolat;
Whom glittering in enamell'd arms the maid
Glanced at, and cried, "What news from Camelot, lord?
What of the knight with the red sleeve?" "He won."
"I knew it," she said. "But parted from the jousts
Hurt in the side;" whereat she caught her breath;
Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go;
Thereon she smote her hand; wellnigh she swoon'd:
And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came
The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the prince
Reported who he was, and on what quest
Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find
The victor, but had ridden a random round
To seek him, and had wearied of the search.
To whom the Lord of Astolat: "Bide with us,
And ride no more at random, noble prince!
Here was the knight, and here he left a shield;
This will he send or come for: furthermore
Our son is with him; we shall hear anon,
Needs must we hear." To this the courteous prince
Accorded with his wonted courtesy,
Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,
And staid; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine;
Where could be found face daintier? then her shape
From forehead down to foot, perfect—again
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd:
"Well—if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!"
And oft they met among the garden yews,
And there he set himself to play upon her
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,
Sighs, and low smiles, and golden eloquence

And amorous adulation, till the maid
Rebell'd against it, saying to him: "Prince,
O loyal nephew of our noble King,
Why ask you not to see the shield he left,
Whence you might learn his name? Why slight your King,
And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove
No surer than our falcon yesterday,
Who lost the hern we slipt her at, and went
To all the winds?" "Nay, by mine head," said he,
"I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven,
O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes;
But an ye will it let me see the shield."
And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw
Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,
Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd:
"Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true man!"
"And right was I," she answer'd merrily, "I,
Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all."
"And if *I* dream'd," said Gawain, "that you love
This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, ye know it!
Speak therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?"
Full simple was her answer: "What know I?
My brethren have been all my fellowship;
And I, when often they have talk'd of love,
Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd,
Meseem'd, of what they knew not; so myself—
I know not if I know what true love is,
But if I know, then, if I love not him,
I know there is none other I can love."
"Yea, by God's death," said he, "ye love him well,

But would not, knew ye what all others know,
And whom he loves." "So be it," cried Elaine,
And lifted her fair face and moved away:
But he pursued her, calling, "Stay a little!
One golden minute's grace! he wore your sleeve:
Would he break faith with one I may not name?
Must our true man change like a leaf at last?
Nay—like enow: why then, far be it from me
To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves!
And, damsel, for I deem you know full well
Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave
My quest with you; the diamond also: here!
For if you love, it will be sweet to give it;
And if he love, it will be sweet to have it
From your own hand; and whether he love or not,
A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well
A thousand times!—a thousand times farewell!
Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two
May meet at court hereafter; there, I think,
So ye will learn the courtesies of the court,
We two shall know each other."

Then he gave,
And slightly kiss'd the hand to which he gave,
The diamond, and all wearied of the quest
Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went
A true-love ballad, lightly rode away.

Thence to the court he past; there told the King
What the King knew, "Sir Lancelot is the knight."
And added, "Sire, my liege, so much I learnt;
But fail'd to find him, tho' I rode all round

The region: but I lighted on the maid
Whose sleeve he wore; she loves him; and to her,
Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,
I gave the diamond: she will render it;
For by mine head she knows his hiding-place."

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied,
"Too courteous truly! ye shall go no more
On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings."

He spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe,
For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word,
Linger'd that other, staring after him;
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.
All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed:
"The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot,
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat."
Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all
Had marvel what the maid might be, but most
Predoom'd her as unworthy. One old dame
Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news.
She, that had heard the noise of it before,
But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low,
Marr'd her friend's aim with pale tranquillity.
So ran the tale like fire about the court,
Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared:
Till even the knights at banquet twice or thrice
Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,
And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid
Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat

With lips severely placid, felt the knot
Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen
Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor
Beneath the banquet, where the meats became
As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat,
Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept
The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,
Crept to her father, while he mused alone,
Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said:
"Father, you call me wilful, and the fault
Is yours who let me have my will, and now,
Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?"
"Nay," said he, "surely." "Wherefore, let me hence,"
She answer'd, "and find out our dear Lavaine."
"Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine:
Bide," answer'd he: "we needs must hear anon
Of him, and of that other." "Ay," she said,
"And of that other, for I needs must hence
And find that other, whereso'er he be,
And with mine own hand give his diamond to him,
Lest I be found as faithless in the quest
As yon proud prince who left the quest to me.
Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Death-pale, for the lack of gentle maiden's aid.
The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,
My father, to be sweet and serviceable
To noble knights in sickness, as ye know,
When these have worn their tokens: let me hence,
I pray you." Then her father nodding said:

"Ay, ay, the diamond: wit ye well, my child,
Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,
Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it—
And sure I think this fruit is hung too high
For any mouth to gape for save a queen's—
Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,
Being so very wilful you must go."

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slipt away,
And while she made her ready for her ride
Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear,
"Being so very wilful you must go,"
And changed itself and echo'd in her heart,
"Being so very wilful you must die."
But she was happy enough and shook it off,
As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us;
And in her heart she answer'd it and said,
"What matter, so I help him back to life?"
Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide
Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs
To Camelot, and before the city-gates
Came on her brother with a happy face
Making a roan horse caper and curvet
For pleasure all about a field of flowers;
Whom when she saw, "Lavaine," she cried "Lavaine,
How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?" He amazed,
"Torre and Elaine! why here? Sir Lancelot!
How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot?"
But when the maid had told him all her tale,
Then turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods
Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,
Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,

Past up the still rich city to his kin,
His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot;
And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove
Led to the caves: there first she saw the casque
Of Lancelot on the wall: her scarlet sleeve,
Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
Stream'd from it still; and in her heart she laugh'd,
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.
And when they gain'd the cell wherein he slept,
His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands
Lay naked on the wolf-skin, and a dream
Of dragging down his enemy made them move.
Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn,
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Utter'd a little tender dolorous cry.
The sound not wonted in a place so still
Woke the sick knight, and while he roll'd his eyes
Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying,
"Your prize the diamond sent you by the King."
His eyes glisten'd: she fancied, "Is it for me?"
And when the maid had told him all the tale
Of king and prince, the diamond sent, the quest
Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt
Full lowly by the corners of his bed,
And laid the diamond in his open hand.
Her face was near, and as we kiss the child
That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face.
At once she slipt like water to the floor.
"Alas," he said, "your ride hath wearied you.
Rest must you have." "No rest for me," she said;
"Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest."

What might she mean by that? his large black eyes,
Yet larger thro' his leanness, dwelt upon her,
Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself
In the heart's colors on her simple face;
And Lancelot look'd and was perplext in mind
And being weak in body said no more,
But did not love the color; woman's love,
Save one, he not regarded, and so turn'd
Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,
And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates
Far up the dim rich city to her kin;
There bode the night: but woke with dawn, and past
Down thro' the dim rich city to the fields,
Thence to the cave. So day by day she past
In either twilight ghost-like to and fro
Gliding, and every day she tended him,
And likewise many a night; and Lancelot
Would, tho' he call'd his wound a little hurt
Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times
Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem
Uncourteous, even he: but the meek maid
Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him
Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,
Milder than any mother to a sick child,
And never woman yet, since man's first fall,
Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love
Upbore her; till the hermit, skill'd in all
The simples and the science of that time,
Told him that her fine care had saved his life.
And the sick man forgot her simple blush,

Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine,
Would listen for her coming and regret
Her parting step, and held her tenderly,
And loved her with all love except the love
Of man and woman when they love their best,
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death
In any knightly fashion for her sake.
And peradventure had he seen her first
She might have made this and that other world
Another world for the sick man; but now
The shackles of an old love straiten'd him,
His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made
Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.
These, as but born of sickness, could not live;
For when the blood ran lustier in him again,
Full often the bright image of one face,
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.
Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace
Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,
Or short and coldly, and she knew right well
What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant
She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,
And drave her ere time across the fields
Far into the rich city, where alone
She murmur'd, "Vain, in vain: it cannot be.
He will not love me: how then? must I die?"
Then as a little helpless innocent bird,
That has but one plain passage of few notes,

Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
For all an April morning, till the ear
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid
Went half the night repeating, "Must I die?"
And now to right she turn'd, and now to left,
And found no ease in turning or in rest;
And "Him or death," she mutter'd, "death or him,"
Again and like a burthen, "Him or death."

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,
To Astolat returning rode the three.
There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self
In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,
She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought,
"If I be loved, these are my festal robes,
If not, the victim's flowers before he fall."
And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid
That she should ask some goodly gift of him
For her own self or hers: "and do not shun
To speak the wish most near to your true heart;
Such service have ye done me that I make
My will of yours, and prince and lord am I
In mine own land, and what I will I can."
Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,
But like a ghost without the power to speak.
And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish,
And bode among them yet a little space
Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced
He found her in among the garden yews,
And said, "Delay no longer, speak your wish,
Seeing I go to-day:" then out she brake:
"Going? and we shall never see you more.

And I must die for want of one bold word."
"Speak: that I live to hear," he said, "is yours."
Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:
"I have gone mad. I love you: let me die."
"Ah, sister," answer'd Lancelot, "what is this?"
And innocently extending her white arms,
"Your love," she said, "your love—to be your wife."
And Lancelot answer'd, "Had I chosen to wed,
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine;
But now there never will be wife of mine."
"No, no," she cried, "I care not to be wife,
But to be with you still, to see your face,
To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world."
And Lancelot answer'd: "Nay, the world, the world,
All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue
To blare its own interpretation—nay,
Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,
And your good father's kindness." And she said,
"Not to be with you, not to see your face—
Alas for me then, my good days are done!"
"Nay, noble maid," he answer'd, "ten times nay!
This is not love, but love's first flash in youth,
Most common: yea, I know it of mine own self;
And you yourself will smile at your own self
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life
To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age.
And then will I, for true you are and sweet
Beyond mine old belief in womanhood,
More specially should your good knight be poor,
Endow you with broad land and territory
Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,

So that would make you happy: furthermore,
Even to the death, as tho' ye were my blood,
In all your quarrels will I be your knight.
This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,
And more than this I cannot."

While he spoke
She neither blush'd nor shook, but deathly-pale
Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied,
"Of all this will I nothing"; and so fell,
And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.

Then spake, to whom thro' those black walls of yew
Their talk had pierced, her father: "Ay, a flash,
I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead.
Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.
I pray you, use some rough discourtesy
To blunt or break her passion."

Lancelot said,
"That were against me: what I can I will;"
And there that day remain'd, and toward even
Sent for his shield: full meekly rose the maid,
Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield;
Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,
Unclasping flung the casement back, and look'd
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone.
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound;
And she by tact of love was well aware
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,
Nor bade farewell, but sadly rode away.
This was the one discourtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat:
His very shield was gone; only the case,
Her own poor work, her empty labor, left.
But still she heard him, still his picture form'd
And grew between her and the pictured wall.
Then came her father, saying in low tones,
"Have comfort," whom she greeted quietly.
Then came her brethren saying, "Peace to thee,
Sweet sister," whom she answer'd with all calm.
But when they left her to herself again,
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd; the owls
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt
Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms
Of evening and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,
And call'd her song "The Song of Love and Death,"
And sang it: sweetly could she make and sing.

"Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain:
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

"Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

"Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away;
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay:
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

"I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me;
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die."

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought
With shuddering, "Hark the Phantom of the house
That ever shrieks before a death," and call'd
The father, and all three in hurry and fear
Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red light of dawn
Flared on her face, she shrilling, "Let me die!"

As when we dwell upon a word we know,
Repeating, till the word we know so well
Becomes a wonder, and we know not why
So dwelt the father on her face, and thought,
"Is this Elaine?" till back the maiden fell,
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.
At last she said: "Sweet brothers, yesternight
I seem'd a curious little maid again,
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,
And when ye used to take me with the flood
Up the great river in the boatman's boat.
Only ye would not pass beyond the cape
That has the poplar on it: there ye fixt
Your limit, oft returning with the tide.
And yet I cried because ye would not pass
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood
Until we found the palace of the King.
And yet ye would not; but this night I dream'd

That I was all alone upon the flood,
And then I said, 'Now shall I have my will:'
And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.
So let me hence that I may pass at last
Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,
Until I find the palace of the King.
There will I enter in among them all,
And no man there will dare to mock at me;
But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,
And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me;
Gawain, who bade a thousand farewells to me,
Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bade me one:
And there the King will know me and my love,
And there the Queen herself will pity me,
And all the gentle court will welcome me,
And after my long voyage I shall rest!"

"Peace," said her father, "O my child, ye seem
Light-headed, for what force is yours to go
So far, being sick? and wherefore would ye look
On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all?"

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move,
And bluster into stormy sobs and say:
"I never loved him: an I meet with him,
I care not howsoever great he be,
Then will I strike at him and strike him down;
Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,
For this discomfort he hath done the house."

To whom the gentle sister made reply:
"Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth.

Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault
Not to love me than it is mine to love
Him of all men who seems to me the highest.'

"Highest?" the father answer'd, echoing
"highest?"
He meant to break the passion in her—"nay,
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;
But this I know, for all the people know it,
He loves the Queen, and in an open shame:
And she returns his love in open shame;
If this be high, what is it to be low?"

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat:
"Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I
For anger: these are slanders; never yet
Was noble man but made ignoble talk.
He makes no friend who never made a foe.
But now it is my glory to have loved
One peerless, without stain; so let me pass,
My father, howsoe'er I seem to you,
Not all unhappy, having loved God's best
And greatest, tho' my love had no return:
Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,
Thanks, but you work against your own desire;
For if I could believe the things you say
I should but die the sooner; wherefore cease,
Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man
Hither, and let me shrive me clean and die."

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,
She, with a face bright as for sin forgiven,

Besought Lavaine to write as she devised
A letter, word for word; and when he ask'd,
"Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord?
Then will I bear it gladly"; she replied,
"For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,
But I myself must bear it." Then he wrote
The letter she devised; which being writ
And folded, "O sweet father, tender and true,
Deny me not," she said—"ye never yet
Denied my fancies—this, however strange,
My latest: lay the letter in my hand
A little ere I die, and close the hand
Upon it; I shall guard it even in death.
And when the heat has gone from out my heart,
Then take the little bed on which I died
For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's
For richness, and me also like the Queen
In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.
And let there be prepared a chariot-bier
To take me to the river, and a barge
Be ready on the river, clothed in black.
I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.
There surely I shall speak for mine own self,
And none of you can speak for me so well.
And therefore let our dumb old man alone
Go with me; he can steer and row, and he
Will guide me to that palace, to the doors."

She ceased: her father promised; whereupon
She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.
But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh

Her father laid the letter in her hand,
And closed the hand upon it, and she died.
So that day there was dole in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from underground,
Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows
Accompanying, the said chariot-bier
Past like a shadow thro' the field, that shone
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,
Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay.
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.
So those two brethren from the chariot took
And on the black decks laid her in her bed,
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung
The silken case with braided blazonings,
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her,
"Sister, farewell forever," and again,
"Farewell, sweet sister," parted all in tears.
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,
Oar'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood—
In her right hand the lily, in her left
The letter—all her bright hair streaming down—
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white
All but her face, and that clear-featured face
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,
But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last



The price of half a realm, his costly gift,
Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,
With deaths of others, and almost his own,
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds; for he saw
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed
With such and so unmoved a majesty
She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye
The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel on the summer side,
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,
They met, and Lancelot kneeling utter'd: "Queen,
Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,
Take, what I had not won except for you,
These jewels, and make me happy, making them
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
Is tawnier than her cygnet's: these are words;
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin
In speaking, yet O, grant my worship of it
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words
Perchance, we both can pardon; but, my Queen,
I hear of rumors flying thro' your court.
Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,
Should have in it an absoluter trust
To make up that defect: let rumors be:
When did not rumors fly? these, as I trust
That you trust me in your own nobleness,
I may not well believe that you believe."

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen
Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine
Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,
Till all the place whereon she stood was green;
Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand
Received at once and laid aside the gems
There on a table near her, and replied:

1177–8 *Necklace for a neck to which the swan's is tawnier than her cygnet's—Her neck is whiter than the swan's. (The neck of the swan is pure white while that of the cygnet, or young swan, has a darker tint.)*

"It may be I am quicker of belief
Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.
Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.
This good is in it, whatsoe'er of ill,
It can be broken easier. I for you
This many a year have done despite and wrong
To one whom ever in my heart of hearts
I did acknowledge nobler. What are these?
Diamonds for me! they had been thrice their worth
Being your gift, had you not lost your own.
To loyal hearts the value of all gifts
Must vary as the giver's. Not for me!
For her! for your new fancy. Only this
Grant me, I pray you: have your joys apart.
I doubt not that, however changed, you keep
So much of what is graceful: and myself
Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy
In which as Arthur's Queen I move and rule;
So cannot speak my mind. An end to this!
A strange one! yet I take it with Amen.
So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls;
Deck her with these; tell her, she shines me down:
An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's
Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck
O, as much fairer—as a faith once fair
Was richer than these diamonds—hers not mine—
Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,
Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will—
She shall not have them."

Saying which she seized,
And, thro' the casement standing wide for heat,

Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the stream.
Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,
Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.
Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain
At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,
Close underneath his eyes, and right across
Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge
Whereon the lily maid of Astolat
Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away
To weep and wail in secret; and the barge,
On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.
There two stood arm'd, and kept the door; to whom,
All up the marble stair, tier over tier,
Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd,
"What is it?" but that oarsman's haggard face,
As hard and still as is the face that men
Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks
On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said:
"He is enchanted, cannot speak—and she,
Look how she sleeps—the Fairy Queen, so fair!
Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and blood?
Or come to take the King to Fairyland?
For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,
But that he passes into Fairyland."

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
Came girt with knights: then turn'd the tongueless man
From the half-face to the full eye, and rose
And pointed to the damsel and the doors.

So Arthur bade the meek Sir Percivale
And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;
And reverently they bore her into hall.
Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,
And Lancelot later came and mused at her,
And last the Queen herself, and pitied her;
But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,
Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:

"Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no return,
And therefore my true love has been my death.
And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,
And to all other ladies, I make moan:
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,
As thou art a knight peerless."

Thus he read;
And ever in the reading lords and dames
Wept, looking often from his face who read
To hers which lay so silent, and at times,
So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips
Who had devised the letter moved again.

Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all:
"My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,
Know that for this most gentle maiden's death
Right heavy am I; for good she was and true,

But loved me with a love beyond all love
In women, whomsoever I have known.
Yet to be loved makes not to love again;
Not at my years, however it hold in youth.
I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave
No cause, not willingly, for such a love.
To this I call my friends in testimony,
Her brethren, and her father, who himself
Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,
To break her passion, some discourtesy
Against my nature: what I could, I did.
I left her and I bade her no farewell;
Tho', had I dreamt the damsel would have died,
I might have put my wits to some rough use,
And help'd her from herself."

Then said the Queen—
Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm:
"Ye might at least have done her so much grace,
Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her death."
He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,
He adding:
"Queen, she would not be content
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.
Then might she follow me thro' the world, she ask'd;
It could not be. I told her that her love
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down,
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame
Toward one more worthy of her—then would I,
More specially were he she wedded poor,
Estate them with large land and territory
In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,

To keep them in all joyance: more than this
I could not; this she would not, and she died."

He pausing, Arthur answer'd: "O my knight,
It will be to thy worship, as my knight,
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,
To see that she be buried worshipfully."

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went
The marshall'd Order of their Table Round,
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont, to see
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,
Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,
And mass, and rolling music, like a queen.
And when the knights had laid her comely head
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,
Then Arthur spake among them: "Let her tomb
Be costly, and her image thereupon,
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.
And let the story of her dolorous voyage
For all true hearts be blazon'd on her tomb
In letters gold and azure!" which was wrought
Thereafter; but when now the lords and dames
And people, from the high door streaming, brake
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,
Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,
Drew near, and sigh'd in passing, "Lancelot,
Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love."
He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,
"That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven."

But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,
Approach'd him, and with full affection said:

"Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have
Most joy and most affiance, for I know
What thou hast been in battle by my side,
And many a time have watch'd thee at the tilt
Strike down the lusty and long practised knight
And let the younger and unskill'd go by
To win his honor and to make his name,
And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man
Made to be loved; but now I would to God,
Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,
Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems,
By God for thee alone, and from her face,
If one may judge the living by the dead,
Delicately pure and marvellously fair,
Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man
Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons
Born to the glory of thy name and fame,
My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake."

Then answer'd Lancelot: "Fair she was, my King,
Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.
To doubt her fairness were to want an eye,
To doubt her pureness were to want a heart—
Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love
Could bind him, but free love will not be bound."

"Free love, so bound, were freest," said the King.
"Let love be free; free love is for the best:
And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,

What should be best, if not so pure a love
Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee
She fail'd to bind, tho' being, as I think,
Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know."

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,
And at the inrunning of a little brook
Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd
The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes
And saw the barge that brought her moving down,
Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said
Low in himself: "Ah, simple heart and sweet,
Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love
Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?
Ay, that will I. Farewell too—now at last—
Farewell, fair lily. 'Jealousy in love?'
Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?
Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,
May not your crescent fear for name and fame
Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes?
Why did the King dwell on my name to me?
Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
Caught from his mother's arms—the wondrous one
Who passes thro' the vision of the night—
She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns
Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn
She kiss'd me saying, 'Thou art fair, my child,
As a king's son,' and often in her arms
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.
Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be!

For what am I? what profits me my name
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain:
Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?
To make men worse by making my sin known?
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break
These bonds that so defame me: not without
She wills it: would I, if she will'd it? nay,
Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,
I pray him, send a sudden angel down
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills."

So groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man.

THE HOLY GRAIL

The legend of the Holy Grail—the cup which was variously believed to have been used by Christ at the Last Supper and to have caught His blood at the Crucifixion—is a legend steeped in the religious mysticism and the knightly idealism of the Middle Ages. In this idyll, Arthur's knights, moved by Galahad's example, pledge themselves to the quest of the holy cup. Arthur tells them that they are breaking their vow to help him right human wrong and that they will but follow "wandering fires." Despite his warning, they go. Each succeeds in the quest only to the measure of his own spiritual nature. Few return, and these are broken men of little use to Arthur in the furthering of his high plans. Out of spiritual arrogance, they had left their clear and simple duty. The disintegration of the Round Table is now a certainty.

THE HOLY GRAIL

FROM noiseful arms, and acts of prowess done
In tournament or tilt, Sir Percivale,
Whom Arthur and his knighthood call'd The Pure,
Had pass'd into the silent life of prayer,
Praise, fast, and alms; and leaving for the cowl
The helmet in an abbey far away
From Camelot, there, and not long after, died.

And one, a fellow-monk among the rest,
Ambrosius, loved him much beyond the rest,
And honor'd him, and wrought into his heart
A way by love that waken'd love within,
To answer that which came: and as they sat
Beneath a world-old yew-tree, darkening half
The cloisters, on a gustful April morn
That puff'd the swaying branches into smoke
Above them, ere the summer when he died,
The monk Ambrosius questioned Percivale:

"O brother, I have seen this yew-tree smoke,
Spring after spring, for half a hundred years.
For never have I known the world without,
Nor ever stray'd beyond the pale: but thee,
When first thou camest—such a courtesy

[2] *Sir Percivale*—According to the earliest legends, it was Percivale, rather than Galahad, who was the hero of the Grail story. Compare with Wagner's opera Parsifal.

[5–6] *Leaving for the cowl the helmet*—Putting aside the arms and tournaments of knighthood for a life of fasting and prayer in a monastery.

[13] *Puff'd the swaying branches into smoke*—The pollen of the yew tree, as it was blown by the April winds, looked like smoke.

Spake thro' the limbs and in the voice—I knew
For one of those who eat in Arthur's hall;
For good ye are and bad, and like to coins,
Some true, some light, but every one of you
Stamp'd with the image of the King; and now
Tell me, what drove thee from the Table Round,
My brother? was it earthy passion crost?"

"Nay," said the knight; "for no such passion mine.
But the sweet vision of the Holy Grail
Drove me from all vainglories, rivalries,
And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out
Among us in the jousts, while women watch
Who wins, who falls; and waste the spiritual strength
Within us, better offer'd up to Heaven."

To whom the monk: "The Holy Grail!—I trust
We are green in Heaven's eyes; but here too much
We moulder—as to things without I mean—
Yet one of your own knights, a guest of ours,
Told us of this in our refectory,
But spake with such a sadness and so low
We heard not half of what he said. What is it?
The phantom of a cup that comes and goes?"

"Nay, monk! what phantom?" answer'd Percivale.
"The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord
Drank at the last sad supper with his own.
This, from the blessed land of Aromat—
After the day of darkness, when the dead

[38] *Green in Heaven's eyes—Alive to spiritual things.*

Went wandering o'er Moriah—the good saint,
Arimathæan Joseph, journeying brought
To Glastonbury, where the winter thorn
Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord.
And there awhile it bode; and if a man
Could touch or see it, he was healed at once,
By faith, of all his ills. But then the times
Grew to such evil that the holy cup
Was caught away to Heaven, and disappear'd."

To whom the monk: "From our old books I know
That Joseph came of old to Glastonbury,
And there the heathen Prince, Arviragus,
Gave him an isle of marsh whereon to build;
And there he built with wattles from the marsh
A little lonely church in days of yore,
For so they say, these books of ours, but seem
Mute of this miracle, far as I have read.
But who first saw the holy thing to-day?"

"A woman," answer'd Percivale, "a nun,
And one no further off in blood from me
Than sister; and if ever holy maid
With knees of adoration wore the stone,
A holy maid; tho' never maiden glow'd,
But that was in her earlier maidenhood,
With such a fervent flame of human love,
Which, being rudely blunted, glanced and shot
Only to holy things; to prayer and praise
She gave herself, to fast and alms. And yet,

[51] *Arimathæan Joseph—Joseph of Arimathæa is supposed to have caught the blood from Christ's wounds in the Grail-cup.*

Nun as she was, the scandal of the Court,
Sin against Arthur and the Table Round,
And the strange sound of an adulterous race,
Across the iron grating of her cell
Beat, and she pray'd and fasted all the more.

"And he to whom she told her sins, or what
Her all but utter whiteness held for sin,
A man wellnigh a hundred winters old,
Spake often with her of the Holy Grail,
A legend handed down thro' five or six,
And each of these a hundred winters old,
From our Lord's time. And when King Arthur made
His Table Round, and all men's hearts became
Clean for a season, surely he had thought
That now the Holy Grail would come again;
But sin broke out. Ah, Christ, that it would come,
And heal the world of all their wickedness!
'O Father!' ask'd the maiden, 'might it come
To me by prayer and fasting?' 'Nay,' said he,
'I know not, for thy heart is pure as snow.'
And so she pray'd and fasted, till the sun
Shone, and the wind blew, thro' her, and I thought
She might have risen and floated when I saw her.

"For on a day she sent to speak with me.
And when she came to speak, behold her eyes
Beyond my knowing of them, beautiful,
Beyond all knowing of them, wonderful,
Beautiful in the light of holiness,
And 'O my brother Percivale,' she said,
'Sweet brother, I have seen the Holy Grail:

For, waked at dead of night, I heard a sound
As of a silver horn from o'er the hills
Blown, and I thought, "It is not Arthur's use
To hunt by moonlight;" and the slender sound
As from a distance beyond distance grew
Coming upon me—O never harp nor horn,
Nor aught we blow with breath, or touch with hand,
Was like that music as it came; and then
Stream'd thro' my cell a cold and silver beam,
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,
Rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive,
Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed
With rosy colors leaping on the wall;
And then the music faded, and the Grail
Past, and the beam decay'd, and from the walls
The rosy quiverings died into the night.
So now the Holy Thing is here again
Among us, brother, fast thou too and pray,
And tell thy brother knights to fast and pray,
That so perchance the vision may be seen
By thee and those, and all the world be heal'd.'

"Then leaving the pale nun, I spake of this
To all men; and myself fasted and pray'd
Always, and many among us many a week
Fasted and pray'd even to the uttermost,
Expectant of the wonder that would be.

"And one there was among us, ever moved
Among us in white armor, Galahad.
'God make thee good as thou art beautiful,'
Said Arthur, when he dubb'd him knight; and none

In so young youth was ever made a knight
Till Galahad: and this Galahad, when he heard
My sister's vision, fill'd me with amaze;
His eyes became so like her own, they seem'd
Hers, and himself her brother more than I.

"Sister or brother none had he; but some
Call'd him a son of Lancelot, and some said
Begotten by enchantment—chatterers they,
Like birds of passage piping up and down,
That gape for flies—we know not whence they come;
For when was Lancelot wanderingly lewd?

"But she, the wan sweet maiden, shore away
Clean from her forehead all that wealth of hair
Which made a silken mat-work for her feet;
And out of this she plaited broad and long
A strong sword-belt, and wove with silver thread
And crimson in the belt a strange device,
A crimson grail within a silver beam;
And saw the bright boy-knight, and bound it on him,
Saying, 'My knight, my love, my knight of heaven,
O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine,
I, maiden, round thee, maiden, bind my belt.
Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen,
And break thro' all, till one will crown thee king
Far in the spiritual city:' and as she spake,
She sent the deathless passion in her eyes
Thro' him, and made him hers, and laid her mind
On him, and he believed in her belief.

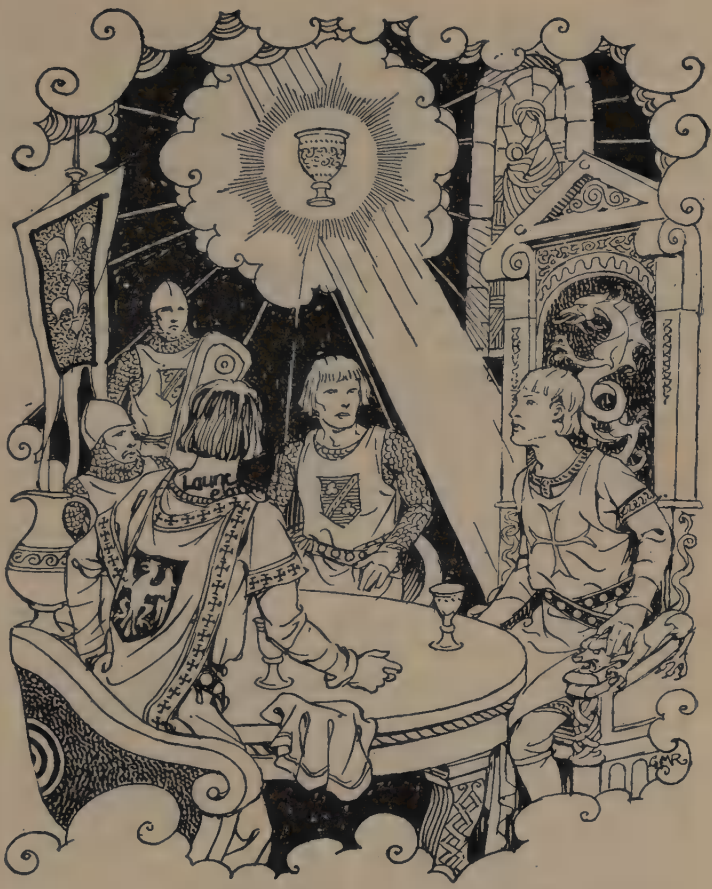
"Then came a year of miracle: O brother,
In our great hall there stood a vacant chair,

Fashion'd by Merlin ere he past away,
And carven with strange figures; and in and out
The figures, like a serpent, ran a scroll
Of letters in a tongue no man could read.
And Merlin call'd it 'The Siege Perilous,'
Perilous for good and ill; 'for there,' he said
'No man could sit but he should lose himself:'
And once by misadvertence Merlin sat
In his own chair, and so was lost; but he,
Galahad, when he heard of Merlin's doom,
Cried, 'If I lose myself I save myself!'

"Then on a summer night it came to pass,
While the great banquet lay along the hall,
That Galahad would sit down in Merlin's chair.

"And all at once, as there we sat, we heard
A cracking and a riving of the roofs,
And rending, and a blast, and overhead
Thunder, and in the thunder was a cry.
And in the blast there smote along the hall
A beam of light seven times more clear than day:
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail
All over cover'd with a luminous cloud,
And none might see who bare it, and it past.
But every knight beheld his fellow's face
As in a glory, and all the knights arose,
And staring each at other like dumb men
Stood, till I found a voice and sware a vow.

[172] *Siege perilous*—Siege means seat.
[178] *If I lose myself, I save myself!*—Compare with The Bible, John XII, 25.



"I sware a vow before them all, that I, 195
Because I had not seen the Grail, would ride
A twelvemonth and a day in quest of it,
Until I found and saw it, as the nun
My sister saw it; and Galahad sware the vow,

And good Sir Bors, our Lancelot's cousin, sware,
And Lancelot sware, and many among the knights,
And Gawain sware, and louder than the rest.

Then spake the monk Ambrosius, asking him,
"What said the King? Did Arthur take the vow?"

"Nay, for my lord," said Percivale, "the King,
Was not in hall: for early that same day,
Scaped thro' a cavern from a bandit hold,
An outraged maiden sprang into the hall
Crying on help: for all her shining hair
Was smear'd with earth, and either milky arm
Red-rent with hooks of bramble, and all she wore
Torn as a sail that leaves the rope is torn
In tempest: so the King arose and went
To smoke the scandalous hive of those wild bees
That made such honey in his realm. Howbeit
Some little of this marvel he too saw,
Returning o'er the plain that then began
To darken under Camelot; whence the King
Look'd up, calling aloud, 'Lo, there! the roofs
Of our great hall are rolled in thunder-smoke!
Pray Heaven, they be not smitten by the bolt.'
For dear to Arthur was that hall of ours,
As having there so oft with all his knights
Feasted, and as the stateliest under heaven.

"O brother," had you known our mighty hall,
Which Merlin built for Arthur long ago!
For all the sacred mount of Camelot,
And all the dim rich city, roof by roof,

Tower after tower, spire beyond spire,
By grove, and garden-lawn, and rushing brook,
Climbs to the mighty hall that Merlin built.
And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt
With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall:
And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
And in the second men are slaying beasts,
And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
And on the fourth are men with growing wings,
And over all one statue in the mould
Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown,
And peak'd wings pointed to the Northern Star.
And eastward fronts the statue, and the crown
And both the wings are made of gold, and flame
At sunrise till the people in far fields,
Wasted so often by the heathen hordes,
Behold it, crying, 'We have still a King.'

"And, brother, had you known our hall within,
Broader and higher than any in all the lands!
Where twelve great windows blazon Arthur's wars,
And all the light that falls upon the board
Streams thro' the twelve great battles of our King.
Nay, one there is, and at the eastern end,
Wealthy with wandering lines of mount and mere,
Where Arthur finds the brand Excalibur.
And also one to the west, and counter to it,
And blank: and who shall blazon it? when and how?—
O there, perchance, when all our wars are done,
The brand Excalibur will be cast away.

[232] *Four great zones of sculpture—Four rows of sculptured figures. Explain the significance of each.*

"So to this hall full quickly rode the King,
In horror lest the work by Merlin wrought,
Dreamlike, should on the sudden vanish, wrapt
In unremorseful folds of rolling fire.
And in he rode, and up I glanced, and saw
The golden dragon sparkling over all:
And many of those who burnt the hold, their arms
Hack'd, and their foreheads grimed with smoke and seared,
Follow'd, and in among bright faces, ours,
Full of the vision, prest: and then the King
Spake to me, being nearest, 'Percivale',
(Because the hall was all in tumult—some
Vowing, and some protesting), 'what is this?'

"O brother, when I told him what had chanced,
My sister's vision, and the rest, his face
Darken'd, as I have seen it more than once,
When some brave deed seem'd to be done in vain,
Darken; and 'Woe is me, my knights,' he cried,
'Had I been here, ye had not sworn the vow.'
Bold was mine answer, 'Had thyself been here,
My King, thou wouldst have sworn.' 'Yea, yea,' said he,
'Art thou so bold and hast not seen the Grail?'

" 'Nay, lord, I heard the sound, I saw the light,
But since I did not see the Holy Thing,
I sware a vow to follow it till I saw.'

"Then when he ask'd us, knight by knight, if any
Had seen it, all their answers were as one:
'Nay, lord, and therefore have we sworn our vows.'

" 'Lo, now,' said Arthur, 'have ye seen a cloud?
What go ye into the wilderness to see?'

"Then Galahad on the sudden, and in a voice
Shrilling along the hall to Arthur, call'd,
'But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail,
I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry—
"O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me." '

" 'Ah, Galahad, Galahad,' said the King, 'for such
As thou art is the vision, not for these.
Thy holy nun and thou have seen a sign—
Holier is none, my Percivale, than she—
A sign to maim this Order which I made.
But ye, that follow but the leader's bell'
(Brother, the King was hard upon his knights)
'Taliessin is our fullest throat of song,
And one hath sung and all the dumb will sing.
Lancelot is Lancelot, and hath overborne
Five knights at once, and every younger knight,
Unproven, holds himself as Lancelot,
Till overborne by one, he learns—and ye,
What are ye? Galahads?—no, nor Percivales'
(For thus it pleased the King to range me close
After Sir Galahad); 'nay,' said he, 'but men
With strength and will to right the wrong'd, of power

[287] *What go ye into the wilderness to see?*—*Compare with The Bible, Matthew XI, 7.*

[297] *A sign to maim this Order*—*Arthur fears that the quest of the Holy Grail will draw the knights away from their Round Table vows to right wrong in his kingdom.*

[300] *Taliessin*—A great Welsh singer of that time.

To lay the sudden heads of violence flat,
Knights that in twelve great battles splash'd and dyed
The strong White Horse in his own heathen blood—
But one hath seen, and all the blind will see.
Go, since your vows are sacred, being made:
Yet—for ye know the cries of all my realm
Pass thro' this hall—how often, O my knights,
Your places being vacant at my side,
This chance of noble deeds will come and go
Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires
Lost in the quagmire! Many of you, yea most,
Return no more: ye think I show myself
Too dark a prophet: come now, let us meet
The morrow morn once more in one full field
Of gracious pastime, that once more the King,
Before ye leave him for this Quest, may count
The yet-unbroken strength of all his knights,
Rejoicing in that Order which he made.'

"So when the sun broke next from under ground,
All the great table of our Arthur closed
And clash'd in such a tourney and so full,
So many lances broken—never yet
Had Camelot seen the like, since Arthur came:
And I myself and Galahad, for a strength
Was in us from the vision, overthrew
So many knights that all the people cried,
And almost burst the barriers in their heat,
Shouting, 'Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale!'

310–320 *While ye follow wandering fires lost in the quagmire—Your quest will be in vain, like following a will-o-the-wisp.*

"But when the next day brake from under ground—
O brother, had you known our Camelot,
Built by old kings, age after age, so old
The King himself had fears that it would fall,
So strange, and rich, and dim; for where the roofs
Totter'd toward each other in the sky,
Met foreheads all along the street of those
Who watch'd us pass; and lower, and where the long
Rich galleries, lady-laden, weigh'd the necks
Of dragons clinging to the crazy walls,
Thicker than drops from thunder, showers of flowers
Fell as we past; and men and boys astride
On wyvern, lion, dragon, griffin, swan,
At all the corners, named us each by name,
Calling 'God speed!' but in the ways below
The knights and ladies wept, and rich and poor
Wept, and the King himself could hardly speak
For grief, and all in middle street the Queen,
Who rode by Lancelot, wail'd and shriek'd aloud,
'This madness has come on us for our sins.'
So to the Gate of the Three Queens we came.
Where Arthur's wars are render'd mystically,
And thence departed every one his way.

"And I was lifted up in heart, and thought
Of all my late-shown prowess in the lists,
How my strong lance had beaten down the knights,
So many and famous names; and never yet
Had heaven appear'd so blue, nor earth so green,

350 Wyvern, lion, dragon, griffin, swan—*These beasts and birds were used in medieval sculpture.*

For all my blood danced in me, and I knew
That I should light upon the Holy Grail.

"Thereafter, the dark warning of our King,
That most of us would follow wandering fires,
Came like a driving gloom across my mind.
Then every evil word I had spoken once,
And every evil thought I had thought of old,
And every evil deed I ever did,
Awoke and cried, 'This Quest is not for thee.'
And lifting up mine eyes, I found myself
Alone, and in a land of sand and thorns,
And I was thirsty even unto death;
And I, too, cried, 'This Quest is not for thee.'

"And on I rode, and when I thought my thirst
Would slay me, saw deep lawns, and then a brook,
With one sharp rapid, where the crisping white
Play'd ever back upon the sloping wave,
And took both ear and eye; and o'er the brook
Were apple-trees, and apples by the brook
Fallen, and on the lawns. 'I will rest here,'
I said, 'I am not worthy of the Quest;'
But even while I drank the brook, and ate
The goodly apples, all these things at once
Fell into dust, and I was left alone,
And thirsting, in a land of sand and thorns.

"And then behold a woman at a door
Spinning; and fair the house whereby she sat,
And kind the woman's eyes and innocent,
And all her bearing gracious; and she rose

Opening her arms to meet me, as who should say,
'Rest here;' but when I touch'd her, lo! she, too,
Fell into dust and nothing, and the house
Became no better than a broken shed,
And in it a dead babe; and also this
Fell into dust, and I was left alone.

"And on I rode, and greater was my thirst.
Then flash'd a yellow gleam across the world,
And where it smote the plowshare in the field,
The plowman left his plowing, and fell down
Before it; where it glitter'd on her pail,
The milkmaid left her milking, and fell down
Before it, and I knew not why, but thought
'The sun is rising,' tho' the sun had risen.
Then was I ware of one that on me moved
In golden armor with a crown of gold
About a casque all jewels; and his horse
In golden armor jewell'd everywhere:
And on the splendor came, flashing me blind;
And seem'd to me the Lord of all the world,
Being so huge. But when I thought he meant
To crush me, moving on me, lo! he, too,
Open'd his arms to embrace me as he came,
And up I went and touch'd him, and he, too,
Fell into dust, and I was left alone
And wearying in a land of sand and thorns.

"And I rode on and found a mighty hill,
And on the top, a city wall'd: the spires
Prick'd with incredible pinnacles into heaven.
And by the gateway stirr'd a crowd; and these

Cried to me climbing, 'Welcome, Percivale!
Thou mightiest and thou purest among men!'
And glad was I and clomb, but found at top
No man, nor any voice. And thence I past
Far thro' a ruinous city, and I saw
That man had once dwelt there; but there I found
Only one man of an exceeding age.
'Where is that goodly company,' said I,
'That so cried out upon me?' and he had
Scarce any voice to answer, and yet gasp'd,
'Whence and what art thou?' and even as he spoke
Fell into dust, and disappear'd, and I
Was left alone once more, and cried in grief,
'Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself
And touch it, it will crumble into dust.'

"And thence I dropt into a lowly vale,
Low as the hill was high, and where the vale
Was lowest, found a chapel, and thereby
A holy hermit in a hermitage,
To whom I told my phantoms, and he said:

" 'O son, thou hast not true humility,
The highest virtue, mother of them all;
For when the Lord of all things made Himself
Naked of glory for His mortal change,
"Take thou my robe," she said, "for all is thine,"
And all her form shone forth with sudden light
So that the angels were amazed, and she
Follow'd Him down, and like a flying star
Led on the gray-hair'd wisdom of the east;
But her thou hast not known: for what is this

Thou thoughtest of thy prowess and thy sins?
Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself
As Galahad.' When the hermit made an end,
In silver armor suddenly Galahad shone
Before us, and against the chapel door
Laid lance, and enter'd, and we knelt in prayer.
And there the hermit slaked my burning thirst,
And at the sacring of the mass I saw
The holy elements alone; but he,
'Saw ye no more? I, Galahad, saw the Grail,
The Holy Grail, descend upon the shrine:
I saw the fiery face as of a child
That smote itself into the bread, and went;
And hither am I come; and never yet
Hath what thy sister taught me first to see,
This Holy Thing, fail'd from my side, nor come
Cover'd, but moving with me night and day,
Fainter by day, but always in the night
Blood-red, and sliding down the blacken'd marsh
Blood-red, and on the naked mountain-top
Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below
Blood-red. And in the strength of this I rode,
Shattering all evil customs everywhere,
And past thro' Pagan realms, and made them mine,
And clash'd with Pagan hordes, and bore them down
And broke thro' all, and in the strength of this
Come victor. But my time is hard at hand,
And hence I go; and one will crown me king
Far in the spiritual city; and come thou, too,
For thou shalt see the vision when I go.'

"While thus he spake, his eye, dwelling on mine,

Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew
One with him, to believe as he believed.
Then, when the day began to wane, we went.

"There rose a hill that none but man could climb,
Scarr'd with a hundred wintry watercourses—
Storm at the top, and when we gained it, storm
Round us and death; for every moment glanced
His silver arms and gloom'd: so quick and thick
The lightnings here and there to left and right
Struck, till the dry old trunks about us, dead,
Yea, rotten with a hundred years of death,
Sprang into fire: and at the base we found
On either hand, as far as eye could see,
A great black swamp and of an evil smell,
Part black, part whiten'd with the bones of men,
Not to be crost, save that some ancient king
Had built a way, where, link'd with many a bridge,
A thousand piers ran into the great Sea.
And Galahad fled along them bridge by bridge,
And every bridge as quickly as he crost
Sprang into fire and vanish'd, though I yearn'd
To follow; and thrice above him all the heavens
Open'd and blazed with thunder such as seem'd
Shoutings of all the sons of God: and first
At once I saw him far on the great Sea,
In silver-shining armor starry-clear;
And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung
Clothed in white samite or a luminous cloud.
And with exceeding swiftness ran the boat,
If boat it were—I saw not whence it came.
And when the heavens open'd and blazed again

Roaring, I saw him like a silver star—
And had he set the sail, or had the boat
Become a living creature clad with wings?
And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung
Redder than any rose, a joy to me,
For now I knew the veil had been withdrawn.
Then in a moment when they blazed again
Opening, I saw the least of little stars
Down on the waste, and straight beyond the star
I saw the spiritual city and all her spires
And gateways in a glory like one pearl—
No larger, tho' the goal of all the saints—
Strike from the sea; and from the star there shot
A rose-red sparkle to the city, and there
Dwelt, and I knew it was the Holy Grail,
Which never eyes on earth again shall see.
Then fell the floods of heaven drowning the deep.
And how my feet recrost the deathful ridge
No memory in me lives; but that I touch'd
The chapel-doors at dawn I know; and thence
Taking my war-horse from the holy man,
Glad that no phantom vext me more, return'd
To whence I came, the gate of Arthur's wars."

522 *The veil had been withdrawn*—Brought near to death and Heaven, the spiritual city. Beyond it, by Galahad's passing, Percivale sees the Grail unveiled.

GUINEVERE

The faithlessness of Guinevere toward Arthur has destroyed the faith of many knights in the way of life which Arthur had tried to establish. Moral decay and intrigues spread through the Court. Modred, Arthur's nephew, plots to overthrow Arthur and take the throne for himself. In this atmosphere, Guinevere's deception of the king can no longer be hidden, and she has fled from all her old companions, even Lancelot, to try to atone for her sins. In the meeting between Arthur and Guinevere, even the king has come to realize the final destruction of his brave hope for a new world.

GUINEVERE

QUEEN GUINEVERE had fled the court, and sat
There in the holy house at Almesbury
Weeping, none with her save a little maid,
A novice: one low light betwixt them burn'd
Blurr'd by the creeping mist, for all abroad,
Beneath a moon unseen albeit at full,
The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,
Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still.

For hither had she fled, her cause of flight
Sir Modred; he that like a subtle beast
Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne,
Ready to spring, waiting a chance: for this
He chill'd the popular praises of the King
With silent smiles of slow disparagement;
And tamper'd with the Lords of the White Horse,
Heathen, the brood by Hengist left; and sought
To make disruption in the Table Round
Of Arthur, and to splinter it into feuds
Serving his traitorous end; and all his aims
Were sharpen'd by strong hate for Lancelot.

For thus it chanced one morn when all the court,
Green-suited, but with plumes that mock'd the may,
Had been—their wont—a-maying and return'd,
That Modred still in green, all ear and eye,
Climb'd to the high top of the garden-wall

Novice—A young girl, preparing to be a nun.
Face-cloth—A cloth placed over the face of a dead person.

To spy some secret scandal if he might,
And saw the Queen who sat betwixt her best
Enid and lissome Vivien, of her court
The wiliest and the worst; and more than this
He saw not, for Sir Lancelot passing by
Spied where he couch'd, and as the gardener's hand
Picks from the colewort a green caterpillar,
So from the high wall and the flowering grove
Of grasses Lancelot pluck'd him by the heel,
And cast him as a worm upon the way;
But when he knew the prince tho' marr'd with dust,
He, reverencing king's blood in a bad man,
Made such excuses as he might, and these
Full knightly without scorn: for in those days
No knight of Arthur's noblest dealt in scorn;
But, if a man were halt, or hunch'd, in him
By those whom God had made full-limb'd and tall,
Scorn was allow'd as part of his defect,
And he was answer'd softly by the King
And all his Table. So Sir Lancelot help
To raise the prince, who rising twice or thrice
Full sharply smote his knees, and smiled, and went:
But, ever after, the small violence done
Rankled in him and ruffled all his heart,
As the sharp wind that ruffles all day long
A little bitter pool about a stone
On the bare coast.

But when Sir Lancelot told
This matter to the Queen, at first she laugh'd
Lightly, to think of Modred's dusty fall,
Then shudder'd, as the village wife who cries,

"I shudder, some one steps across my grave;"
Then laugh'd again, but faintlier, for indeed
She half-foresaw that he, the subtle beast,
Would track her guilt until he found, and hers
Would be for evermore a name of scorn.
Henceforward rarely could she front in hall,
Or elsewhere, Modred's narrow foxy face,
Heart-hiding smile, and gray persistent eye.
Henceforward too, the Powers that tend the soul,
To help it from the death that cannot die,
And save it even in extremes, began
To vex and plague her. Many a time for hours,
Beside the placid breathings of the King,
In the dead night, grim faces came and went
Before her, or a vague spiritual fear—
Like to some doubtful noise of creaking doors,
Heard by the watcher in a haunted house,
That keeps the rust of murder on the walls—
Held her awake: or if she slept she dream'd
An awful dream; for then she seem'd to stand
On some vast plain before a setting sun,
And from the sun there swiftly made at her
A ghastly something, and its shadow flew
Before it till it touch'd her, and she turn'd—
When lo! her own, that broadening from her feet,
And blackening, swallow'd all the land, and in it
Far cities burnt, and with a cry she woke.
And all this trouble did not pass but grew,
Till even the clear face of the guileless King,
And trustful courtesies of household life,
Became her bane; and at the last she said,
"O Lancelot, get thee hence to thine own land,

For if thou tarry we shall meet again,
And if we meet again some evil chance
Will make the smouldering scandal break and blaze
Before the people and our lord the King."
And Lancelot ever promised, but remain'd,
And still they met and met. Again she said,
"O Lancelot, if thou love me get thee hence."
And then they were agreed upon a night—
When the good King should not be there—to meet
And part for ever. Vivien, lurking, heard.
She told Sir Modred. Passion-pale they met
And greeted. Hands in hands, and eye to eye,
Low on the border of her couch they sat
Stammering and staring. It was their last hour,
A madness of farewells. And Modred brought
His creatures to the basement of the tower
For testimony; and crying with full voice,
"Traitor, come out, ye are trapt at last," aroused
Lancelot, who rushing outward lionlike
Leapt on him, and hurl'd him headlong, and he fell
Stunn'd, and his creatures took and bare him off,
And all was still. Then she, "The end is come,
And I am shamed for ever"; and he said:
"Mine be the shame; mine was the sin: but rise,
And fly to my strong castle over-seas:
There will I hide thee till my life shall end,
There hold thee with my life against the world."
She answer'd: "Lancelot, wilt thou hold me so?
Nay, friend, for we have taken our farewells.
Would God that thou couldst hide me from myself!
Mine is the shame, for I was wife, and thou
Unwedded; yet rise now, and let us fly,

For I will draw me into sanctuary,
And bide my doom." So Lancelot got her horse,
Set her thereon, and mounted on his own,
And then they rode to the divided way,
There kiss'd, and parted weeping: for he past,
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen,
Back to his land; but she to Almesbury
Fled all night long by glimmering waste and weald,
And heard the spirits of the waste and weald
Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan:
And in herself she moan'd, "Too late, too late!"
Till in the cold wind that foreruns the morn,
A blot in heaven, the raven, flying high,
Croak'd, and she thought, "He spies a field of death;
For now the heathen of the Northern Sea,
Lured by the crimes and frailties of the court,
Begin to slay the folk and spoil the land."

And when she came to Almesbury she spake
There to the nuns, and said, "Mine enemies
Pursue me, but, O peaceful Sisterhood,
Receive and yield me sanctuary, nor ask
Her name to whom ye yield it till her time
To tell you"; and her beauty, grace, and power
Wrought as a charm upon them, and they spared
To ask it.

So the stately Queen abode
For many a week, unknown, among the nuns,
Nor with them mix'd, nor told her name, nor sought,
Wrapt in her grief, for housel or for shrift,

But communed only with the little maid,
Who pleased her with a babbling heedlessness
Which often lured her from herself; but now,
This night, a rumor wildly blown about
Came that Sir Modred had usurp'd the realm
And leagued him with the heathen, while the King
Was waging war on Lancelot: then she thought,
"With what a hate the people and the King
Must hate me," and bow'd down upon her hands
Silent, until the little maid, who brook'd
No silence, brake it, uttering "Late! so late!
What hour, I wonder now?" and when she drew
No answer, by and by began to hum
An air the nuns had taught her: "Late, so late!"
Which when she heard, the Queen look'd up, and said,
"O maiden, if indeed ye list to sing,
Sing, and unbind my heart that I may weep."
Whereat full willingly sang the little maid.

"Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!
Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

"No light had we: for that we do repent,
And learning this, the bridegroom will relent.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

"No light: so late! and dark and chill the night!
O, let us in, that we may find the light!
Too late, too late, ye cannot enter now!

166–177 *This song refers to the story or parable of the foolish virgins in The Bible, Matthew XXV.*

"Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?
O, let us in, tho' late, to kiss his feet!
No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now."



So sang the novice, while full passionately,
Her head upon her hands, remembering
Her thought when first she came, wept the sad Queen.
Then said the little novice prattling to her:

"O pray you, noble lady, weep no more;
But let my words—the words of one so small,
Who knowing nothing knows but to obey,
And if I do not there is penance given—
Comfort your sorrows; for they do not flow
From evil done: right sure am I of that,
Who see your tender grace and stateliness.
But weigh your sorrows with our lord the King's,
And weighing find them less; for gone is he
To wage grim war against Sir Lancelot there,
Round that strong castle where he holds the Queen;
And Modred whom he left in charge of all,
The traitor—Ah, sweet lady, the King's grief
For his own self, and his own Queen, and realm,
Must needs be thrice as great as any of ours!
For me, I thank the saints, I am not great;
For if there ever come a grief to me
I cry my cry in silence, and have done:
None knows it, and my tears have brought me good.
But even were the griefs of little ones
As great as those of great ones, yet this grief
Is added to the griefs the great must bear,
That, howsoever much they may desire
Silence, they cannot weep behind a cloud;
As even here they talk at Almesbury
About the good King and his wicked Queen,
And were I such a King with such a Queen,
Well might I wish to veil her wickedness,
But were I such a King it could not be."

Then to her own sad heart mutter'd the Queen,
"Will the child kill me with her innocent talk?"

But openly she answer'd, "Must not I,
If this false traitor have displaced his lord,
Grieve with the common grief of all the realm?"

"Yea," said the maid, "this is all woman's grief,
That *she* is woman, whose disloyal life
Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round
Which good King Arthur founded, years go,
With signs and miracles and wonders, there
At Camelot, ere the coming of the Queen."

Then thought the Queen within herself again,
"Will the child kill me with her foolish prate?"
But openly she spake and said to her,
"O little maid, shut in by nunnery walls,
What canst thou know of Kings and Tables Round,
Or what of signs and wonders, but the signs
And simple miracles of thy nunnery?"

To whom the little novice garrulously:
"Yea, but I know: the land was full of signs
And wonders ere the coming of the Queen.
So said my father, and himself was knight
Of the great Table—at the founding of it,
And rode thereto from Lyonnesse; and he said
That as he rode, an hour or maybe twain
After the sunset, down the coast, he heard
Strange music, and he paused, and turning—there.
All down the lonely coast of Lyonnesse,
Each with a beacon-star upon his head,
And with a wild sea-light about his feet,
He saw them—headland after headland flame

Far on into the rich heart of the west:
And in the light the white mermaiden swam,
And strong man-breasted things stood from the sea,
And sent a deep sea-voice thro' all the land,
To which the little elves of chasm and cleft
Made answer, sounding like a distant horn.
So said my father—yea, and furthermore,
Next morning, while he past the dim-lit woods,
Himself beheld three spirits mad with joy
Come dashing down on a tall wayside flower,
That shook beneath them as the thistle shakes
When three gray linnets wrangle for the seed:
And still at evenings on before his horse
The flickering fairy-circle wheel'd and broke
Flying, and link'd again, and wheel'd and broke
Flying, for all the land was full of life.
And when at last he came to Camelot,
A wreath of airy dancers hand-in-hand
Swung round the lighted lantern of the hall;
And in the hall itself was such a feast
As never man had dream'd; for every knight
Had whatsoever meat he long'd for served
By hands unseen; and even as he said
Down in the cellars merry bloated things
Shoulder'd the spigot, straddling on the butts
While the wine ran: so glad were spirits and men
Before the coming of the sinful Queen."

Then spake the Queen and somewhat bitterly,
"Were they so glad? ill prophets were they all,
Spirits and men: could none of them foresee,
Not even thy wise father with his signs

And wonders, what has fallen upon the realm?"

To whom the novice garrulously again:
"Yea, one, a bard; of whom my father said,
Full many a noble war-song had he sung,
Even in the presence of an enemy's fleet,
Between the steep cliff and the coming wave;
And many a mystic lay of life and death
Had chanted on the smoky mountain-tops,
When round him bent the spirits of the hills
With all their dewy hair blown back like flame.
So said my father—and that night the bard
Sang Arthur's glorious wars, and sang the King
As wellnigh more than man, and rail'd at those
Who call'd him the false son of Gorloïs:
For there was no man knew from whence he came;
But after tempest, when the long wave broke
All down the thundering shores of Bude and Bos,
There came a day as still as heaven, and then
They found a naked child upon the sands
Of dark Tintagil by the Cornish sea,
And that was Arthur; and they foster'd him
Till he by miracle was approven King:
And that his grave should be a mystery
From all men, like his birth; and could he find
A woman in her womanhood as great
As he was in his manhood, then, he sang,
The twain together well might change the world.
But even in the middle of his song
He falter'd, and his hand fell from the harp,
And pale he turn'd, and reel'd, and would have fallen,
But that they stay'd him up; nor would he tell

His vision; but what doubt that he foresaw
This evil work of Lancelot and the Queen?"

Then thought the Queen, "Lo! they have set her on,
Our simple-seeming abbess and her nuns,
To play upon me," and bow'd her head nor spake.
Whereat the novice crying, with clasp'd hands,
Shame on her own garrulity garrulously,
Said the good nuns would check her gadding tongue
Full often, "and, sweet lady, if I seem
To vex an ear too sad to listen to me,
Unmannerly, with prattling and the tales
Which my good father told me, check me too
Nor let me shame my father's memory, one
Of noblest manners, tho' himself would say
Sir Lancelot had the noblest; and he died,
Kill'd in a tilt, come next, five summers back,
And left me; but of others who remain,
And of the two first-famed for courtesy—
And pray you check me if I ask amiss—
But pray you, which had noblest, while you moved
Among them, Lancelot or our lord the King?"

Then the pale Queen look'd up and answer'd her:
"Sir Lancelot, as became a noble knight,
Was gracious to all ladies, and the same
In open battle or the tilting-field
Forbore his own advantage, and the King
In open battle or the tilting-field
Forbore his own advantage, and these two
Were the most nobly-manner'd men of all;
For manners are not idle, but the fruit
Of loyal nature and of noble mind."

"Yea," said the maid, "be manners such fair fruit?
Then Lancelot's needs must be a thousand-fold
Less noble, being, as all rumor runs,
The most disloyal friend in all the world."

To which a mournful answer made the Queen:
"O, closed about by narrowing nunnery-walls,
What knowest thou of the world and all its lights
And shadows, all the wealth and all the woe?
If ever Lancelot, that most noble knight,
Were for one hour less noble than himself,
Pray for him that he scape the doom of fire,
And weep for her who drew him to his doom."

"Yea," said the little novice, "I pray for both;
But I should all as soon believe that his,
Sir Lancelot's, were as noble as the King's,
As I could think, sweet lady, yours would be
Such as they are, were you the sinful Queen."

So she, like many another babbler, hurt
Whom she would soothe, and harm'd where she would heal;
For here a sudden flush of wrathful heat
Fired all the pale face of the Queen, who cried:
"Such as thou art be never maiden more
For ever! thou their tool, set on to plague
And play upon and harry me, petty spy
And traitress!" When that storm of anger brake
From Guinevere, aghast the maiden rose,
White as her veil, and stood before the Queen
As tremulously as foam upon the beach
Stands in a wind, ready to break and fly,

And when the Queen had added, "Get thee hence!"
Fled frighted. Then that other left alone
Sigh'd, and began to gather heart again,
Saying in herself: "The simple, fearful child
Meant nothing, but my own too-fearful guilt,
Simpler than any child, betrays itself.
But help me, Heaven, for surely I repent!
For what is true repentance but in thought—
Not even in inmost thought to think again
The sins that made the past so pleasant to us?
And I have sworn never to see him more,
To see him more."

And even in saying this,
Her memory from old habit of the mind
Went slipping back upon the golden days
In which she saw him first, when Lancelot came,
Reputed the best knight and goodliest man,
Ambassador, to yield her to his lord
Arthur, and led her forth, and far ahead
Of his and her retinue moving, they,
Rapt in sweet talk or lively, all on love
And sport and tilts and pleasure,—for the time
Was may-time, and as yet no sin was dream'd,—
Rode under groves that look'd a paradise
Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth
That seem'd the heavens upbreaking thro' the earth,
And on from hill to hill, and every day
Beheld at noon in some delicious dale
The silk pavilions of King Arthur raised
For brief repast or afternoon repose
By couriers gone before; and on again,

Till yet once more ere set of sun they saw
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship,
That crown'd the state pavilion of the King,
Blaze by the rushing brook or silent well.

But when the Queen immersed in such a trance,
And moving thro' the past unconsciously,
Came to that point where first she saw the King
Ride toward her from the city, sigh'd to find
Her journey done, glanced at him, thought him cold,
High, self-contain'd, and passionless, not like him,
"Not like my Lancelot"—while she brooded thus
And grew half-guilty in her thought again,
There rode an armed warrior to the doors.
A murmuring whisper thro' the nunnery ran,
Then on a sudden a cry, "The King!" She sat
Stiff-stricken, listening; but when armed feet
Thro' the long gallery from the outer doors
Rang coming, prone from off her seat she fell,
And grovell'd with her face against the floor.
There with her milk-white arms and shadowy hair
She made her face a darkness from the King,
And in the darkness heard his armed feet
Pause by her; then came silence, then a voice,
Monotonous and hollow like a ghost's
Denouncing judgment, but, tho' changed, the King's:

"Liest thou here so low, the child of one
I honor'd, happy, dead before thy shame?
Well is it that no child is born of thee.
The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,

The craft of kindred and the godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea;
Whom I, while yet Sir Lancelot, my right arm,
The mightiest of my knights, abode with me,
Have everywhere about this land of Christ
In twelve great battles ruining overthrown.
And knowest thou now from whence I come—from him,
From waging bitter war with him; and he,
That did not shun to smite me in worse way,
Had yet that grace of courtesy in him left,
He spared to lift his hand against the King
Who made him knight: but many a knight was slain;
And many more and all his kith and kin
Clave to him, and abode in his own land.
And many more when Modred raised revolt,
Forgetful of their troth and fealty, clave
To Modred, and a remnant stays with me.
And of this remnant will I leave a part,
True men who love me still, for whom I live,
To guard thee in the wild hour coming on,
Lest but a hair of this low head be harm'd.
Fear not: thou shalt be guarded till my death.
Howbeit I know, if ancient prophecies
Have err'd not, that I march to meet my doom.
Thou hast not made my life so sweet to me,
That I the King should greatly care to live;
For thou hast spoilt the purpose of my life.
Bear with me for the last time while I show,
Even for thy sake, the sin which thou hast sinn'd
For when the Roman left us, and their law
Relax'd its hold upon us, and the ways

Were fill'd with rapine, here and there a deed
Of prowess done redress'd a random wrong.
But I was first of all the kings who drew
The knighthood-errant of this realm and all
The realms together under me, their Head,
In that fair Order of my Table Round,
A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time.
I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honor his own word as if his God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her; for indeed I knew
Of no more subtle master under heaven
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought, and amiable words
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.
And all this throve before I wedded thee,
Believing, 'Lo, mine helpmate, one to feel

458 *Knighthood-errant*—*Wandering knights with no fixed purpose.*
464–474 *I made them lay their hands in mine etc.*—*Memorize King Arthur's oath.* compare to p. 45 line 5 ll 6 > 18

My purpose and rejoicing in my joy!'
Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
Then others, following these my mightiest knights,
And drawing foul ensample from fair names,
Sinn'd also, till the loathsome opposite
Of all my heart had destined did obtain,
And all thro' thee! so that this life of mine
I guard as God's high gift from scathe and wrong,
Not greatly care to lose; but rather think
How sad it were for Arthur, should he live,
To sit once more within his lonely hall,
And miss the wonted number of my knights,
And miss to hear high talk of noble deeds
As in the golden days before thy sin.
For which of us who might be left could speak
Of the pure heart, nor seem to glance at thee?
And in thy bowers of Camelot or of Usk
Thy shadow still would glide from room to room,
And I should evermore be vext with thee
In hanging robe or vacant ornament,
Or ghostly footfall echoing on the stair.
For think not, tho' thou wouldst not love thy lord,
Thy lord has wholly lost his love for thee.
I am not made of so slight elements.
Yet must I leave thee, woman, to thy shame.
I hold that man the worst of public foes
Who either for his own or children's sake,
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife
Whom he knows false abide and rule the house:
For being thro' his cowardice allow'd
Her station, taken everywhere for pure,

She like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,
Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young.
Worst of the worst were that man he that reigns!
Better the King's waste hearth and aching heart
Than thou reseated in thy place of light,
The mockery of my people and their bane!"

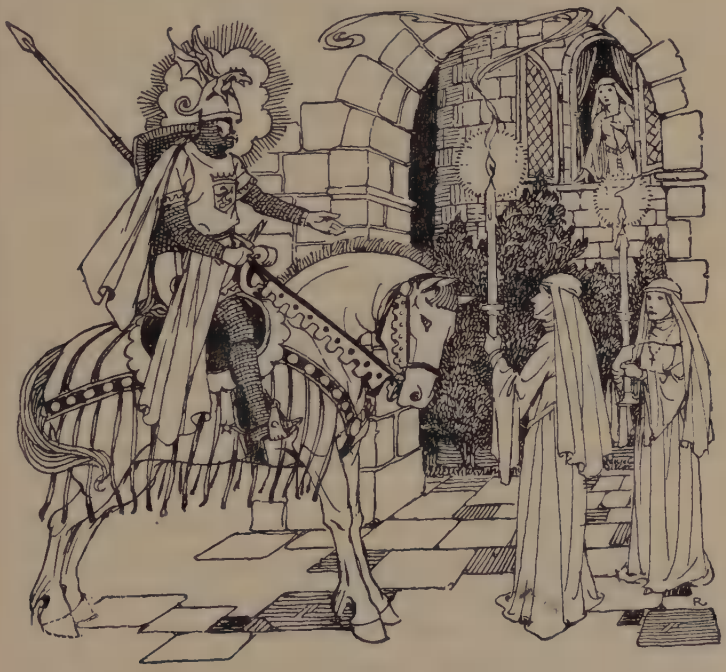
He paused, and in the pause she crept an inch
Nearer, and laid her hands about his feet.
Far off a solitary trumpet blew.
Then waiting by the doors the war-horse neigh'd
As at a friend's voice, and he spake again:

"Yet think not that I come to urge thy crimes;
I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere,
I, whose vast pity almost makes me die
To see thee, laying there thy golden head,
My pride in happier summers, at my feet.
The wrath which forced my thoughts on that fierce law,
The doom of treason and the flaming death,—
When first I learnt thee hidden here,—is past.
The pang—which, while I weigh'd thy heart with one
Too wholly true to dream untruth in thee,
Made my tears burn—is also past—in part.
And all is past, the sin is sinn'd, and I,
Lo, I forgive thee, as Eternal God
Forgives! do thou for thine own soul the rest.
But how to take last leave of all I loved?
O golden hair, with which I used to play
Not knowing! O imperial-moulded form,

And beauty such as never woman wore,
Until it came a kingdom's curse with thee—
I cannot touch thy lips, they are not mine,
But Lancelot's; nay, they never were the King's.
I cannot take thy hand; that too is flesh,
And in the flesh thou hast sinn'd; and mine own flesh,
Here looking down on thine polluted, cries,
'I loathe thee': yet not less, O Guinevere,
For I was ever virgin save for thee.
My love thro' flesh hath wrought into my life
So far that my doom is, I love thee still.
Let no man dream but that I love thee still.
Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,
And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,
Hereafter in that world where all are pure
We two may meet before high God, and thou
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know
I am thine husband—not a smaller soul,
Nor Lancelot, nor another. Leave me that,
I charge thee, my last hope. Now must I hence.
Thro' the thick night I hear the trumpet blow:
They summon me their King to lead mine hosts
Far down to that great battle in the west,
Where I must strike against the man they call
My sister's son—no kin of mine, who leagues
With Lords of the White Horse, heathen, and knights,
Traitors—and strike him dead, and meet myself
Death, or I know not what mysterious doom.
And thou remaining here wilt learn the event;
But hither shall I never come again,
Never lie by thy side, see thee no more—
Farewell!"

And while she grovell'd at his feet,
She felt the King's breath wander o'er her neck,
And in the darkness o'er her fallen head
Perceived the waving of his hands that blest.

Then, listening till those armed steps were gone,
Rose the pale Queen, and in her anguish found
The casement: "peradventure," so she thought,



"If I might see his face, and not be seen."
And lo, he sat on horseback at the door!

And near him the sad nuns with each a light
Stood, and he gave them charge about the Queen,
To guard and foster her for evermore.
And while he spake to these his helm was lower'd,
To which for crest the golden dragon clung
Of Britain; so she did not see the face,
Which then was as an angel's, but she saw,
Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights,
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship
Blaze, making all the night a stream of fire.
And even then he turn'd; and more and more
The moony vapor rolling round the King,
Who seem'd the phantom of a giant in it,
Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray
And grayer, till himself became as mist
Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom.

Then she stretch'd out her arms and cried aloud,
"O Arthur!" there her voice brake suddenly,
Then—as a stream that spouting from a cliff
Fails in mid air, but gathering at the base
Re-makes itself, and flashes down the vale—
Went on in passionate utterance:

"Gone—my lord!
Gone thro' my sin to slay and to be slain!
And he forgave me, and I could not speak.
Farewell? I should have answer'd his farewell.
His mercy choked me. Gone, my lord the King,
My own true lord! how dare I call him mine?
The shadow of another cleaves to me,
And makes me one pollution: he, the King,

Call'd me polluted: shall I kill myself?
What help in that? I cannot kill my sin,
If soul be soul; nor can I kill my shame;
No, nor by living can I live it down.
The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months,
The months will add themselves and make the years,
The years will roll into the centuries,
And mine will ever be a name of scorn.
I must not dwell on that defeat of fame,
Let the world be; that is but of the world—
What else? what hope? I think there was a hope,
Except he mock'd me when he spake of hope;
His hope he call'd it; but he never mocks,
For mockery is the fume of little hearts.
And blessed be the King, who hath forgiven
My wickedness to him, and left me hope
That in mine own heart I can live down sin
And be his mate hereafter in the heavens
Before high God! Ah great and gentle lord,
Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint
Among his warring senses, to thy knights—
To whom my false voluptuous pride, that took
Full easily all impressions from below,
Would not look up, or half-despised the height
To which I would not or I could not climb—
I thought I could not breathe in that fine air,
That pure severity of perfect light—
I yearn'd for warmth and color which I found
In Lancelot—now I see thee what thou art,
Thou art the highest and most human too,
Not Lancelot, nor another. Is there none
Will tell the King I love him tho' so late?

Now—ere he goes to the great battle? none:
Myself must tell him in that purer life,
But now it were too daring. Ah my God,
What might I not have made of thy fair world,
Had I but loved thy highest creature here?
It was my duty to have loved the highest;
It surely was my profit had I known;
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
We needs must love the highest when we see it,
Not Lancelot, nor another."

Here her hand
Grasp'd, made her vail her eyes: she look'd and saw
The novice, weeping, suppliant, and said to her,
"Yea, little maid, for am *I* not forgiven?"
Then glancing up beheld the holy nuns
All round her, weeping; and her heart was loosed
Within her, and she wept with these and said:

"Ye know me then, that wicked one, who broke
The vast design and purpose of the King.
O, shut me round with narrowing nunnery-walls,
Meek maidens, from the voices crying, 'Shame!'
I must not scorn myself: he loves me still.
Let no one dream but that he loves me still.
So let me, if you do not shudder at me,
Nor shun to call me sister, dwell with you;
Wear black and white, and be a nun like you,
Fast with your fasts, not feasting with your feasts;
Grieve with your griefs, not grieving at your joys,
But not rejoicing; mingle with your rites;
Pray and be pray'd for; lie before your shrines;

Do each low office of your holy house;
Walk your dim cloister, and distribute dole
To poor sick people, richer in His eyes
Who ransom'd us, and haler too than I;
And treat their loathsome hurts and heal mine own;
And so wear out in alms-deed and in prayer
The sombre close of that voluptuous day
Which wrought the ruin of my lord the King."

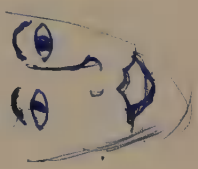
She said: they took her to themselves; and she
Still hoping, fearing "is it yet too late?"
Dwelt with them, till in time their abbess died.
Then she, for her good deeds and her pure life,
And for the power of ministration in her,
And likewise for the high rank she had borne,
Was chosen abbess, there, an abbess, lived
For three brief years, and there, an abbess, past
To where beyond these voices there is peace.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR



After parting forever with Guinevere at the monastery at Almesbury, Arthur leads the knights still loyal to him in pursuit of Sir Modred and his rebel followers. A decisive battle occurs when Modred is finally cornered. The final events in the story of Arthur are told below by loyal Sir Bedivere, one of the first men to be knighted by King Arthur and the only one of the Round Table left alive.

take 3 passages from Caesar
for context





THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

THAT story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
First made and latest left of all the knights,
Told, when the man was no more than a voice
In the white winter of his age, to those
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King:

"I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.
O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful?
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is:
Perchance, because we see not to the close;—
For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain;
And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend

9–27 *I found Him in the shining of the stars, etc.*—*Note that King Arthur is referring to the fact that he found God in the beauty of Nature, but not in the ways of men—and wonders whether God has forsaken him.*

"Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death:
Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die."

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
Went shrilling: "Hollow, hollow all delight!
Hail, King! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
And I am blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight!"
And fainter onward, like wild birds that change
Their season in the night and wail their way
From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream
Shrill'd; but in going mingled with dim cries
Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,
As of some lonely city sack'd by night,
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail
Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and call'd:
"Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,
Thine, Gawain, was the voice—are these dim cries
Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?"

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake:
"O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field;
But in their stead thy name and glory cling
To all high places like a golden cloud

For ever: but as yet thou shalt not pass.
Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;
And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise—
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,
And with him many of thy people, and knights
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old."

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"Far other is this battle in the west
Whereto we move than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way
Thro' this blind haze which, ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world."

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league,
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonnesse—

[81] Lyonnesse—*Note that King Arthur's career ends in the same region where he had been born—in Lyonnesse—now submerged beneath the sea.*

A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,
And the long mountains ended in a coast
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.
There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled no further fly the King;
And there, that day when the great light of heaven
Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year,
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.
A death-white mist slept over sand and sea,
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
With formless fear; and even on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;
And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
Look in upon the battle; and in the mist
Was many a noble deed, many a base,
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battle-axes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist;
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,

Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, laboring of the lungs
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death
Or death-like swoon, thus over all that shore,
Save for some whisper of the seething seas,
A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came
A bitter wind, clear from the north, and blew
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field
Of battle: but no man was moving there;
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,
Nor yet of heathen; only the wan wave
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
And shiver'd brands that once had fought with Rome,
And rolling far along the gloomy shores
The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,
And whiter than the mist that all day long
Had held the field of battle was the King:

"Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,
And beats upon the faces of the dead,
My dead, as tho' they had not died for me?—

O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fallen
Confusion, till I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be king;
Behold, I seem but king among the dead."

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: "My King;
King everywhere! and so the dead have kings,
There also will I worship thee as king.
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live
Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred, unharm'd, the traitor of thine house."

Then spake the King: "My house hath been my doom.
But call not thou this traitor of my house
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.
My house are rather they who sware my vows,
Yea, even while they brake them, own'd me king.
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
When all the purport of my throne hath fail'd,
That quick or dead thou holdest me for king.
King am I, whatsoever be their cry;
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass." And uttering this the King
Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
Slew him, and, all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea;

Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonnesse about their lord,
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land:
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made,—
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more; but, let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword—and how I row'd across

[183] *The sequel of to-day unsolders all*—*The result of the battle breaks up the knights of the Round Table and all Arthur has worked for.*

And took it, and have worn it, like a king;
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known.
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere;
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word."

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
"It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm—
A little thing may harm a wounded man;
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word."

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt;
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seem'd

Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted water-flags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag."

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
"Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight;
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word."

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fixt in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud:

"And if indeed I cast the brand away,

Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done?
What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumors of a doubt? But were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying: 'King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely Maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills.'
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honor and much fame were lost."

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
"What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"I heard the water lapping on the crag,

And the long ripple washing in the reeds."

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
"Ah miserable, and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands."

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,[307]
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock[308]
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur;

[307] *A streamer of the northern morn—The northern lights (Aurora Borealis).*
[308] *The moving isles of winter shock—The icebergs clash.*



But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
"Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere."

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
"My end draws nigh; 't is time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die."

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words;
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die."
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
And on a sudden, lo, the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon!

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

[366] *Three queens*—Compare with Line 275 in The Coming of Arthur.

Then murmur'd Arthur, "Place me in the barge."
So to the barge they came. There those three queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colorless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the daïs-throne—were parch'd with dust,
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mixt with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.

383–4 *And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops of onset—The armor on his legs and thighs were spattered with the blood of battle.*

Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh. -
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds."

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:
"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest—if indeed I go—
For all my mind is clouded with a doubt—
To the island-valley of Avilion;

[408] *The old order changeth*—Compare with *Line 508 in* The Coming of Arthur.

[427] *Avilion*—*In Celtic mythology Avilion, or Avalon, was Paradise in the West.*

Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past for evermore,
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groan'd, "The King is gone."
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
"From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron crag,
Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried:
"He passes to be king among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound
He comes again; but—if he come no more—
O me, be yon dark queens in yon black boat,
Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
They stood before his throne in silence, friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?"

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Even to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

Hope. After Arthurs death the world would never be the same.

barge - pagan

[409] *And the new sun rose bringing the new year—Note how the idyll ends with the new year and the hope it brings for the future.*

Part III

THE KING'S HENCHMAN

THE KING'S HENCHMAN

King Eadgar was born in 1050 A.D. He was the grandson of an English (Saxon) king. Although he tried to gain the British throne, he was unsuccessful. This story, like the Idylls, *is therefore not based on fact but makes a fascinating comparison with the tales of King Arthur who is supposed to have ruled England some 500 years previously.*

The young King Eadgar's wife has died, and he is longing for another beautiful woman to be his queen. Rumors have come to him that the daughter of one of his loyal noblemen, the Thane of Devon, is a lovely young lady. Although he cannot leave the court to find out for himself whether this girl is really beautiful, Eadgar, like his predecessor King Arthur, has a faithful henchman to whom he entrusts this important mission of going to bring back the future Queen of England. As you read this Act, note the many similarities to Lancelot's mission in "The Coming of Arthur."

In reading the Second Act, compare the theme with the Idylls of the King *and note how in each case a beautiful woman, affianced to the King, made loyal knights forsake their sworn vows of fealty.*

Note the stage directions which Miss Millay has included for setting the stage of this play. (As the Idylls of Tennyson *are merely poems, no stage directions have been included for them.)*

PERSONS

EADGAR, *King of England*
DUNSTAN, *Archbishop of Canterbury*
ÆTHELWOLD, *Earl of East Anglia, foster-brother and friend to Eadgar*
ORDGAR, *Thane of Devon*
GUNNER
CYNRIC
BRAND
INGILD
WULFRED
OSLAC
} *Lords at the Hall of King Eadgar*
MACCUS, *servant and friend to Æthelwold*
THORED, *Master-of-the-Household to Ordgar*
HWITA, *Cup-bearer to the King*
A BLACKSMITH A SADDLER A MILLER A FISHERMAN
ANOTHER FISHERMAN AN OLD MAN

ÆLFRIDA, *Daughter to Ordgar*
HILDEBURH
OSTHARU
GODGYFU
LEOFSYDU
MERWYNNA
} *Ladies at the Hall of King Eadgar*
ASE, *servant to Ælfrida*
ENID, *wife of Thored*
A BLACKSMITH'S WIFE
A MILLER'S WIFE
A FISHERMAN'S WIFE
A NEAT-HERD'S WIFE
A WOMAN-SERVANT
ANOTHER WOMAN-SERVANT
A YOUNG GIRL
WYNNA, *a child, daughter of Thored*

Other lords and ladies, attendants, cup-bearers, villagers, fishermen, etc.

The King's Henchman

ACT I

TIME: Tenth Century
PLACE: England

Hall of KING EADGAR *at Winchester. A great room of gray stone, with small windows deep-set in the wall, and massive doors. On one side of the room, at the spectator's left, stands a long table of oak, roughly carved, at the further end of which is a handsome, high-backed wooden settle, and along the sides of which run wooden benches without backs.*

It is five o'clock of a morning about the end of September. Through the thick glass of the small windows a pale daylight enters, but makes little headway in the room, which is lighted now by tall rush torches, and by a double row of candles running the length of the table. The table is laden with a variety of meats and loaves on heavy trenchers, together with cups and goblets, mostly of horn, some few of thick glass. Everything is in that disorder which attends the end of a banquet: goblets overturned, dripping mead upon the hard earth of the floor; a boar's head with little to identify it but the two strong tusks; remnants of pig and venison; bag puddings; wild-honey combs; and rinds and scraps of white and yellow cheese.

At the head of the table, on the high-backed settle, sits KING EADGAR, *a dark man, short, stockily built, with a handsome head, black hair, and a black beard. He is less than twenty-five years old, but his thoughtful face, grave eyes, and dignified bearing give him the appearance of being*

somewhat older; he has been a king for ten years, and shows it.

On the right of EADGAR *is seated* DUNSTAN, *Archbishop of Canterbury, a man of forty, clean-shaven, with a pale face and bright gray eyes, wearing his house cassock, a black robe with purple at the neck. During the most of the act* DUNSTAN *talks to* EADGAR *earnestly.*

On DUNSTAN'S *right sits* BRAND; *on* BRAND'S *right* GUNNER, *a slim, worldly man, with a keen, gay face.*

On EADGAR'S *left is a vacant place. Next the vacant place is* OSLAC, *a fat fellow, sound asleep, with his head on the table.*

At the foot of the table are two places; that on the right is vacant; the other is occupied by INGILD, *a big man with blue eyes and a rick of red hair. The other places are filled by* CYNRIC, WULFRED,—*a round-faced boy of sixteen, who has already swung his ax against the Danes in Yorkshire—and several other lords, in various stages of intoxication,—one sleepy, another sad, another argumentative.*

Nearly all present are men between the ages of sixteen and thirty; in these times only yokels lived to grow old. They are dressed for the most part in skins, with kilts and sleeveless jackets of rough woolen stuff, and hose strapped from ankle to knee with deerskin thongs. EADGAR *is dressed much like the others, except for a cloth cape heavily embroidered in rich colors, which is fastened at his shoulder by an enamel brooch, and a signet-ring of heavy gold.*

On the right side of the room, not seated, but leaning against the doorway or half-sitting in the window recess, is a group of ladies, several of them wives of lords at the table. The matrons may be distinguished from the maidens by the fact that their hair, in the few instances when it is not hidden under a cap, is seen to be cut short; the unmarried women wear their hair down their backs, usually in two

braids, and no cap, but only a narrow fillet about the forehead.

The ladies are not guests at the feast, but have been permitted to steal in to hear the songs of the harper. They keep themselves well in the background, not timorously, but as a matter of course, whispering among themselves. One or two have embroidery frames; when nothing else is going forward to arrest their attention, they bend their heads and stitch.

At the rise of the curtain MACCUS, *trusty servant and true friend of Æthelwold, and also the most skillful and beloved harper for many shires about, is seated on a stool in the center of the stage, singing to the accompaniment of his harp. He is a man whose life has miraculously been preserved to the age of nearly fifty, scarred with battle wounds, with grizzled hair and beard and a rich, deep voice. He has been singing for over an hour the familiar and favorite saga of the glory and death of Cynewulf, King of Wessex long ago, who, under cover of darkness, was treacherously put to death by a rival for the throne. All faces, save those of Oslac and one or two others, sunken in sleep, are turned earnestly toward* MACCUS. *The men lean forward across the table, their fists clenched, their jaws set; the women stand with their hands clutched to their breasts or hovering at their lips, in rapt and passionate attention.*

MACCUS [*Singing to the accompaniment of a harp*]

. . . Wild as the white waves
Rushing and roaring, Heaving the wrack
High up the headland; Hoarse as the howling
Winds of the winter, When the lean wolves
Harry the hindmost, Horseman and horse
Toppled and tumbled; So at the town gate,

Stroke upon stroke, Sledging and slaying,
Swashes the sword, Shivers the shield
Of foeman and kinsman: Such was the fight!
But lustless and lank By the bower of the Lady,
Quenchèd forever, Quellèd and cold,
Cynewulf the King!

THE LADY HILDEBURH

Weep, weep for Cynewulf, wretched King!

CYNRIC

Mark ye, not a man of all his men
Was handy to help him!

GUNNER

Not they, the fat swine! Rooting in the kitchen for mast!
Nuzzling i' the mash-vat!

KING EADGAR

Now, by the mead of Odin, a good tale, mightily told!
Come hither, Maccus, and slake thee!
Thou hast a throat like a corn kiln, or I'm a Welshman.

Lord, and how sorrow-sweet, for all thy manly wounds,
Thou sangest the white Lenten-tide,
And lover from his leman sundered,—
Thou bearded nightingale!

Cynewulf's death is made more dramatic by the exciting account of a battle in which he could not take part.
Odin—Supreme god of the Norsemen.

MACCUS

It was the harp that sang, O Shield of Albion;
Not I.
[*He returns to his seat beside* INGILD, *at the foot of the table.* HWITA *fills a goblet for the King, then a cup for* MACCUS. *Other cup-bearers go the rounds of the table.*]

CYNRIC

Ho, Oslac!
Thou'lt fall into thy cup!

GUNNER

No fear, my friend:
The cup has long since fallen into Oslac.
[*Laughter from the others*]

OSLAC [*Waking up, drunkenly*]

Where's Æthelwold?

BRAND

Hast thou looked under the board for him?

GUNNER

Under the board? He cannot see above it,
From where he sits!
[*Roars of laughter*]

WULFRED

Let 'em not feaze thee, Oslac, my lad; sleep on.

Albion—England.

[*The lords continue to laugh and jest among themselves. On the other side of the room the ladies are gossiping.*]

THE LADY HILDEBURH [*To* GODGYFU]

Who is the woman, then?

GODGYFU

[*A dark, handsome girl, more than a little in love with the King*]
Good shrift, *I* know not!

OSTHARU [*Looking up from her embroidery*]
The woman is daughter to Ordgar, Thane of Devon.
"Ælfrida," she hight.

GODGYFU

I wonder the King sendeth not to Damascus for his bride!
Why stand at Devon?

HILDEBURH

'Tis said she is rankly fair.

GODGYFU

'Tis said of others.

OSTHARU

And I ween the chest of silver mancuses
Beside her father's bed
Doth not bedim her, neither.

Thane of Devon—Lord of Devon in southwestern England not far from the ancient realm of King Arthur.

HILDEBURH

Is he so rich in silver, the old man?

OSTHARU

Dear lady, he dare not stand too nigh the fire,
Lest he melt in his hose
And come out candlesticks!
[*They all titter for a moment at the picture thus presented, all except* GODGYFU.]

GODGYFU

[*Rising, and going to join another group of women*]
Howe'er it be,
And be she rich as silk,
Eadgar will naught of her,
If she be not fair as the moon.

MERWYNNA

[*Leaving another group and coming up to join them*]
Have ye heard the newest?

HILDEBURH *and* OSTHARU [*Together*]

What's the newest, then?

MERWYNNA

Know ye the King doth send Lord Æthelwold
To fetch him home his bride?

HILDEBURH

Thou'rt not in earnest?

MERWYNNA

Yea, truly.

OSTHARU

A pretty mess he'll make of it!

HILDEBURH

Is then a woman's heart a Danish town,
To be took by dint of sword?

LEOFSYDU [*Softly*]

'Tis a sweet lad.
'Tis a sweet, frozen lad.

OSLAC

[*Waking up, and looking aggrievedly at the vacant place beside him at the table, drunkenly*]
Where's Æthelwold?
I had my head on his shoulder.

GUNNER

Then 'tis the first head lay ever on his shoulder,
If tales be true.

CYNRIC

Nay, 'tis a known thing.
He maketh no bones of it.
Bold heart and a doughty arm in the fight he hath—
And in sooth his name alone in the Cambrian twilight
Will gast the Harlech bairn—
Yet for all that, and all that,

Cambrian—Welsh.

At the Hall of King Love
Not yet is he dubbed Rider!

INGILD

Yea, so. 'Tis true as doom.
He shunneth a fair maid
As she were a foul-marten.
And should a wench but breathe upon him i' the dark,
He would bury himself till the smell of her were off him.

GUNNER

'Tis a toothless babe the King sends into Devon
To bite his shilling.

BRAND

Belike. But 'tis a babe will fetch the shilling home
Sound in his fist, though fire and flood betide;
Nor lose it on the road; nor yield it up
To any forty reavers may beset him;
Nor spend his nights a-shining of it on his own sleeve.
And that is somewhat.

CYNRIC

Yea, by my sword, 'tis much.
Sithen they were lads
Such trusting love doth live betwix these two
As singeth like a bird on a bough.
Light need or heavy need, the King in all things
Doth turn to Æthelwold, as he to Eadgar.

Bite his shilling—Judge his choice.

The heathen on his heath, into whose windy ear no whisper
Of Christian god-spell yet hath come,
Hath heard the tale of Eadgar and the wounded boar,
And Æthelwold's great love, to which the King
Doth owe his life. How on the slope of Brecon
Eadgar, having sent his spear and found the grunting wight
Full in the shoulder,—whereat the boar came at him,
Foaming and wroth—did nimbly step aside;
And how a hemlock put out its braided foot
And trapped him, and he fell, and the sickening breath
Was in his nostrils, and the tusk was at his throat;
So that he called out, "Brother!" and Æthelwold
Came running, and leapt upon them, throwing his wolf-skin
Over the little blood-shot eyes, and in his arms
Hugging the great head backward, said,
"Have out my knife and do him to the heart";
Which the King did.
[*There is a silence.*]

BRAND

Fear for the King's life
He knoweth. But as for himself,
He knoweth not Fear by sight; he hath not seen
Her shadow on a wall.

[*Enter through the door in the right* ÆTHELWOLD, *and crosses to the fire. As he passes the ladies, they look up, and follow him with gentle eyes. He is a fair, beardless youth, slender, but muscular and*

Slope of Brecon—Mountain in Wales.

strong, seemingly younger than EADGAR, *although in fact his foster-brother.*]

CYNRIC [*To* ÆTHELWOLD]

Ho, there thou art!
Talk of the Evil One, and thou treadest on his tail!
[EADGAR *looks up, and lifts his hand in affectionate greeting to* ÆTHELWOLD, *who smiles, and lifts his hand in reply.*]

BRAND [*To* ÆTHELWOLD]

Come back and be friendly!

CYNRIC

What's all this hopping up and rushing out and tweaking of saddle-straps,—
As thou hadst never foot in stirrup ere this day!

BRAND

[*Reaching across the table for* ÆTHELWOLD'S *cup, and turning it bottom up*]
Sooth, Æthelwold, a man's a man,
E'en in these ladylike days,
And the little time a Saxon hath to himself,
What with kissing the Welsh and cuddling the Danes,
He owes to English drinking!

ÆTHELWOLD [*At the fire, warming his hands*]

'Tis nigh daybreak.
Ye'd not believe, sitting here like a folkmoot of moles,
How bright the world is without.

Foster-brother—*Æthelwold was brought up with Eadgar.*

GUNNER

And thou, thou wouldst not believe, out there in the barnyard,
Snuffing up the wind like a fox,
How good the ale is within!

ÆTHELWOLD

A little wind is running like a tide
Over the grass. It maketh a marsh of the dooryard.
And the sweet stench of the loam riseth sharp and chill.

OSLAC [*Drunkenly, staring at him*]

Æthelwold!
Come back here and sit down!
[ÆTHELWOLD *comes over to the table, amid laughter, and stands beside* OSLAC, *with his knee on the bench.*]

CYNRIC

Yea, friend. Here's Oslac, drunk as a Dane, hath yelped in his sleep
He had his head on thy shoulder.

ÆTHELWOLD [*To the King's cup-bearer*]

Hwita!
Where is the boy?

HWITA

[*Hurrying forward with a jug of mead and a drinking-cup*]
Here, my lord!

ÆTHELWOLD

Good. Give it four legs, Hwita,
And let it walk to me by itself.
[HWITA *brings him a cup and fills it.*]

EADGAR [*Joining* ÆTHELWOLD *at the fire*]

How goes it with the mare?

ÆTHELWOLD

Never better.
And champing to be off.

EADGAR

And with thyself?

ÆTHELWOLD

Sooth, as for me—
[*He pauses, then bursts out in a troubled voice*]
I'd ride to hell for thee, and thou knowest it, Eadgar!
I'd be thy henchman to the Fiend himself!—
And call it but a half-day's run.
But as for Devon, I am not the man to send!

EADGAR

I know thou'rt loath to go.
Nor would I ask it of thee, Æthelwold,
But being so beset with irksome business
I cannot stir from my stool.
Being, as I say, so teased with this and that,
I am stowed here for the winter in Winchester,
I have called upon thee, that are my milk brother and
my more than brother,
To ride out in my stead.

Milk brother—They had been nursed together.

ÆTHELWOLD

I am not unmindful, Eadgar.
And I would thou hadst need of my heart to throw to thy hound:
Thou shouldst have it.
I speak no idle word.
But as for Devon,—I am not the man to send!
How shall I say a woman is foul or fair?—
So many dry leaves in a ditch they are to me,
These whispering girls,
A little fairish and a little foulish,
And all alike, and mightily underfoot!

EADGAR

'Tis for that I send thee.
Thou art not like to go giddy and swoon from horse
At the first wimple thou sightest on a Devonshire down.
Whom should I send in thy stead,—a man like Ingild?—
That recketh not if a wench be crippled or straight,
So she be warm-hearted?

Lo, thou,—I am sad, ywis, of my widowed lot,
And would be wed again.
But not to the first red kirtle thou'lt meet on a market-day,—
Else wherefore turn from home?
Lord, I am lonesome for a lovely woman
To buy things for!

Bright silk that clashes like a sword!
And gems from the East, not seen before in England!

And weigh her down with them, that she might not walk
But leaning on mine arm.
Ah, Æthelwold,
What dost thou think on in the Lenten-tide,
When the white thorn blossoms in the haw?

ÆTHELWOLD

I think on the Lenten-tide,
And the white thorn.
[*He is silent a moment.*]
Well, be it as thou wilt.
And by my winding-sheet,
I'll do my best for thee.
Yet, if I fetch thee home a gallèd filly
With dock-burrs in her mane,
Thoul't thank me sparingly.

EADGAR

Thank thee, thou miller's thumb?—felt quality
I'll wed thee to the wench!

Come, knowest thou thine errand by heart?—
Say it over to me, then

ÆTHELWOLD

Know I mine errand?
Thinkest thou a man hath a nightmare pawing his chest

Winding-sheet—Death shroud.
Gallèd filly—Sore young mare (unsatisfactory female)

All night for nigh three sennights,
And knoweth not if she be iron-gray or dun?
So runs it:
I climb to my saddle and I ride and I ride and I ride,
Till I come to the gate of the house of the Thane of Devon.

EADGAR

In sooth.

ÆTHELWOLD

I knock at the gate, and I say to the Thane,
"Good day, good Thane. Is thy daughter in?"
She's bound to be in;
Women never go out.

EADGAR

In sooth.

ÆTHELWOLD

I say to the daughter, "Good morrow, good maid.
Eadgar, son of Edmund, a loutish lad,
But a worthy chapman, hath heard thou art fair.
Now if thou be fair as men say thou be,
Then do on thy hood and hop to saddle with me;
And sooner than a weasel can suck a duck's egg
Thou wilt be Queen of England!"

EADGAR

In sooth.
[*He is silent, sunk in thought.*]
In sooth.

In sooth—*In truth; that's right.*

[*He rises slowly.*]
Æthelwold,—
Wilt thou pledge me?

ÆTHELWOLD [*Leaping to his feet*]

Pledge thee, Eadgar!
Yea, so, by the Rood, will I!

EADGAR

Hwita!
Wine here!
In the cup of the Romsey nuns!
[*All the lords and ladies look up; and as* HWITA *appears, handing to* EADGAR *a goblet of richly fretted gold, they rise.* EADGAR *takes the cup, holds it aloft, then offers it to* ÆTHELWOLD.]

ÆTHELWOLD [*Lifting the cup to his lips*]

Wassail!

EADGAR

[*In the manner of the ancient ceremony, drawing his sword and holding it before* ÆTHELWOLD, *as if to protect him*]
Drink hale!
[*He strikes his sword into the ground between them.* ÆTHELWOLD *holds the cup aloft, then offers it to* EADGAR.]

EADGAR [*Lifting the cup to his lips*]

Wassail!



ÆTHELWOLD

[*Drawing his sword and holding it before* EADGAR *as if to protect him*]
Drink hale!
[*He strikes his sword into the ground beside that of* EADGAR. EADGAR *gives back the cup to* HWITA. EADGAR *and* ÆTHELWOLD *clasp hands over the hilts of their swords.*]

LORDS *and* LADIES

[*With lifted arms, the men holding their drinking cups high*]
Wassail!

ÆTHELWOLD [*To* EADGAR]

Now is thy Weird my Weird, and thy foe my fiend!

EADGAR

'Twix thee and wolfish want,
'Twix thee and sorrow,
'Twix thee and the singing arrow with the darkened fang,
I stand with open breast!

Life, that is stronger than I, is not so strong
As thou and I!

ÆTHELWOLD

Death, that is stronger than I, is not so strong
As thou and I!

TOGETHER

Unquellèd, thou and I,
Till Life and Death be friends!

LORDS *and* LADIES

Wassail!
[EADGAR *and* ÆTHELWOLD *sheathe their swords.*]

Weird—Fate (In reality a witch symbolizing fate.)

EADGAR [*To* ÆTHELWOLD]

Come now and see the day,
If the sun be up!
[*They turn and walk toward the back of the stage. Two doorkeepers run up and swing open the heavy doors, revealing, immediately without, a stoutly walled courtyard with a closed gate, and beyond, an autumn countryside. It is bright dawn.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

The eastern wall is astir and the gate ajar!

EADGAR

The night is done, my lords.
Blow ye the candles out!

ÆTHELWOLD [*To* EADGAR]

Whiles thou and I blow out the morning star!

EADGAR

Up, Sun! Stir in thy straw!
Night yawns, and sighs to give over the watch to thee!

ÆTHELWOLD

Day breaks. I go.

[*To* DUNSTAN]

Thy blessing, father, upon me and upon mine errand.

DUNSTAN

[*Lifting his hands above* ÆTHELWOLD'S *head*]

Thee, my son,
I freely bless,

And commit unto the care of the Most High.
As for thine errand—
[*He drops his hands and turns away.*]
I would to my heart that wise and holy *magister,*
Paulus of Tarsus, in my humble stead might speak
Unto the King, that seeketh now a second wife!
[*The men of* ÆTHELWOLD'S *retinue begin to ride past the door, singing, and draw up before the gate in the outer wall. During the song* EADGAR *and* ÆTHELWOLD, *with their arms about each other's shoulders, keep time by stamping the floor;* GUNNER *and the other lords, by beating with their drinking-cups upon the table.*]

MACCUS and Retinue

Oh, Cæsar, great wert thou!
And Julius was thy name!
That furrowed thy way through a fallow spray,
And to stormy Britain came!
But I would not stand in thy stead,
For I'd liefer be quick than dead!

ALL MEN

But I would not stand in thy stead,
For I'd liefer be quick than dead!

ÆTHELWOLD

Oh, Cæsar, great wert thou!

EADGAR

And Hadrian was thy name!

ALL MEN

Thine eye did itch till a Roman ditch
Was dug in British shame!
But I would not stand in thy stead,
For I'd liefer be quick than dead!

ALL MEN AND WOMEN

Cæsar, thy day is done!
Whiles ours is but begun!
[ÆTHELWOLD's *mare is at the door, held by an attendant. He goes up to her and throws his arm over the saddle.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

Farewell, all here!
[*The doorkeepers open the outer gate.*]

ALL

Farewell!
Fare thou well, and God be with thee!
Fair weather and good roads!
God keep thee from all fear!
God be with thee!
Farewell!
[ÆTHELWOLD *and* EADGAR *clasp hands.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

Ere the summer goose flies,
Thou shalt have word from Devon.

EADGAR

God keep thee, Æthelwold!

ÆTHELWOLD

God shield thee, my King!

[*He leaps to the saddle.*]

[*To all*]
Farewell!

ALL

Farewell!

[ÆTHELWOLD *turns his horse and rides briskly off through the gate, followed by* MACCUS *and the men of his train.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

A forest in Devonshire. A month later. Through a dense fog the great shapes of oaks and beeches are dimly visible, with here and there the slender trunk of a birch, or the rounded clump of a holly tree. It is the evening of All Hallow Mass. The night is not dark, but faintly luminous, owing to the presence of a full moon striving to penetrate the fog. Enter from the side, slowly, and looking about him like a man who has lost his way, ÆTHELWOLD, *and stands, visible to the audience through a thin veil of mist.*

ÆTHELWOLD [*Calling*]

Maccus!

MACCUS [*Invisible, but close at hand*]

My lord!

ÆTHELWOLD

Thou'rt nearer than I thought.
Findest thou aught of a road?

MACCUS

I find no road a weasel would follow to market,—
But as a short cut.
And thou?

ÆTHELWOLD

There was a road; but here sharply it diveth
Into the earth.
I know not where we are. We are as lost
As we shall ever be.
Come hither, wilt thou?

All Hallow Mass—Hallowe'en.

[*He seats himself upon a fallen tree.*]
Here ran the road.
[*Musing*]
And here at my feet it diveth
Into the earth.
Can it be the woman is daughter to the Fiend,
And I must woo her in hell?

MACCUS [*Somewhat further away*]

Ywis, my lord.
All women are daughters to the Dark One.
Spare only two. And they—
[*He stumbles, and crashes into the bushes*]
And they [*somewhat further away*] be sisters to him.

ÆTHELWOLD

Maccus, thou'rt going from me!
Turn back!

MACCUS

From thee!
That's playful!
Am I a rush-light, that thou bobbest about me in the mist like a moth?

ÆTHELWOLD

Nay, friend, thou'rt turned about.
Come this way.

MACCUS [*Nearer*]

Where art thou?

ÆTHELWOLD

Here!

MACCUS

Speak again.

ÆTHELWOLD

Here!
[*Pause.*]
There'd be a moon tonight,
Were it not for the mist.

MACCUS [*Near by*]

In sooth.
There'd be a sun tonight,
Were it not otherwise.
My belly is windy with It-would-be-if-it-were-not!
Where art thou, i' God's name?

ÆTHELWOLD

Here!
[*The shape of* MACCUS *emerges from the fog.*]

ÆTHELWOLD *and* MACCUS [*together*]

I see thee!

ÆTHELWOLD [*Stretching out his hands to* MACCUS]

Well met!
The mist is in thy beard.

MACCUS

As for thy beard,
I think 'tis in the mist, for I see it not!
[*He laughs.*]
Is this thy road to the Pit?

ÆTHELWOLD

Yea, Maccus.
What sayest thou to this?

MACCUS

I say that if this be the gateway to her bower,
Then is thy lady daughter to a fox!

ÆTHELWOLD

My lady, Maccus!—Bestow her not on me!

MACCUS [*Gloomily*]

Yea, so. Thy lady.
[*He seats himself on the log beside* ÆTHELWOLD.]
Thy lady to woo,
And the King's to wed.
So runneth the tale,
And 'tis a tale for madmen.
God wot, and I wot well, it is a tale for madmen.

ÆTHELWOLD

Lord, what a merry churl art thou
To be lost in a wood with!
What ails thee, man?

MACCUS [*After a silence*]

My heart hath a stone in its shoe.
[*Pause.*]
Would we had left a clue of thread behind us.
Then might my goodwife wind me home to breakfast.
'Tis mealtime.

ÆTHELWOLD [*Yawning*]

'Tis bedtime.

MACCUS [*Presently*]

I'll have another look about for the men.
That is to say, a grope and a smell about.
That is to say, a blind man's look about.

ÆTHELWOLD

Go not far, I beseech thee, Maccus. Bear in mind
The wood's bewitched with mist.

MACCUS

Fear not. I'll fell an oak at every step,
To mark me back.
[*He goes out on the right.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

As for me, there's but one thing in the world I crave:
And that's to stretch me out along the moss,
And sleep from now to Lammas.
[*Going back up stage toward the right.*]
O darling Sleep, hast thou a word for mine ear?—
I will not shout thee down.
[*Invisible to audience.*]
Dog-tired I am.
Ah, this is good.
Say what ye will, the wild deer have the best of it.
There's an uncouth man for you, that Maccus,
That standeth up when he might lie down.
I'll be asleep ere mine arm be under my head.

Lammas—The Feast of the Loaves on August 1st.

[*Silence falls again upon the forest. The trees stand motionless in the fog. A few pale beech leaves circle slowly down. From somewhere on the left a sound is heard—the small crash of a branch underfoot. Presently on the left a faint glow appears, as of a lamp in the fog. Then comes the sound of voices.*]

ÆLFRIDA [*Off-stage*]

I'll go no further!
Had I known I was to wade,
I would have come barefoot.
Sawst thou ever the moss so sea-weed sodden wet?

ASE [*Off-stage*]

Nay, sooth, my lady.
In all my born days never,
Not I.
I cannot say am I afloat or ashore.

[*Enter from the back on the left, slowly appearing through the fog,* ÆLFRIDA, *a mature girl of seventeen, lithe and tall. Her long hair, which is very fair in color, but not so much yellow as pale red, falls in bright waves over her shoulders, confined only by a silver fillet about the forehead. Her eyes are wide and dark, her scarlet mouth soft but imperiously set, her skin dazzling in its whiteness; she is beautiful. She is dressed in a soft, pale garment without sleeves, and wrapped in a dark cloak. Her movements are graceful and free, like those of an animal accustomed to find sure footing over difficult ground. Following* ÆLFRIDA *comes* ASE, *carrying a torch.* ASE *is a small dark woman of forty, with a sharp face.*]

ASE

They say, my lady, when 'tis thick on Hallow Mass Eve,
'Tis the steam from the witches' kettle.

ÆLFRIDA

The steam!—'tis the broth itself.
[*She looks about her.*]
Well, thou must go now, Ase.
Nay, bide a bit:
That spell of thine—will it work as well with the light?

ASE

Yea, better, if thou keep the light behind thee;
Then mayest thou see his shadow beside thine own on the mist;
As now, see thine and mine.
[*She holds the torch behind them.*]

ÆLFRIDA [*Seeing the two shadows on the mist*]

Shield me! I should fall in a swoon!
Behind my back, thou sayst,—
That's knavish!
Yet better a knave of mine own
Than a knight of my father's choosing.
Well—thou must leave me, I think.
[ASE *turns to go.*]
Ase!—Art thou going?

ASE [*Pausing*]

Be not eery, my lady.
There's naught to harm thee here, in the shadow of thy home.

Many and many a maid
This Hallow Mass Day at Night,
Doth seek in spell and rune, even as thou,
Her lover that is to be.

ÆLFRIDA

Yea, but not all
In such a mizzling mist!
I am not eery.
But I think I have been bolder--
In the daytime—
Indoors.
Go now, and go lively, Ase, for my marrow oozeth!

ASE

I leave thee the light.
[*She gives the torch to* ÆLFRIDA *and goes out on the left. Pause.*]

ÆLFRIDA

What am I doing here
In the dripping dark,
On the eve of All Hallows?
Ghosts alone
Of men long dead
And weanèd to the dripping dark
Will be abroad tonight;
And tittering elfin things,
To stroke me with their nails!
No lissome, laughing ghost
Of warm and living youth
Will rise from the ground at my spell!

How runneth the rune she taught me—
"White-thorn and black-thorn"—
Nay, I've lost it. 'Tis clean shunted off.

I wonder, had I done better to sit at home
And bide by the tidy fire
A tidy fireside love!
Or take, and be done with it, the thick and bumbling churl
That my father hath in mind?

No, by my shift!
How runneth the rune?—
"White-thorn and black-thorn"—
I must stand with the light at my back—
[*She holds the torch behind her.*]
And God knoweth what beside I turn my back to!
"White-thorn—white-thorn—"
'Tis on the tip of my tongue—
[*She hesitates.*]
But my tongue is at the roof of my mouth!
I would I were yawning at home with my hands in my lap!

Bide a bit—so it goes!—
(I trust there's naught un-Christian in it;
I had meant to ask her.
Either way, I'm guiltless.
For I am unaware.)
[*She sings. Whenever in the course of her song she comes to the word "holy-bough," she crosses herself.*]

White-thorn and black-thorn,
Red haws in the hedge,
Sloes in the hedge, woad-black,
And a dusty dew on them;
Hairy stem
Of fennel,
Holy-bough and dill,
Dark yew;
Wormwood, woody nightshade,
And thy baleful sister, too!
Show me in dream, yet nothing dim.
The shadow and the shape of him!
All Hallows Eve is All Saints Morning!

Seeds of poppy, small and black,
Borne to mill upon my back,
Into little loaves I'll knead,
For to bake him sleepy-bread;
Lest he leave me, lest he rise and leave me.
White-thorn, black-thorn, holy-bough, poppy-seed,
Bake him sleepy-bread.
All Hallows Eve is All Saints Morning!

Nettle, sheathe thy naughty smart,
Be of bristles callow;
Bind his heart upon my heart,
Withy of the sallow.
White-thorn, black-thorn, periwinkle, holy-bough,
Withy of the sallow!
All Hallows Eve is All Saints Morning!

Rise now in dream, yet nothing dim,
The shadow and the shape of him.

[*She holds the torch behind her at arm's length. During the preceding song the fog has gradually been lifting, revealing a deep forest. High in the distance is seen the lighted window of a house. Scarves of mist still cling about the bushes and trees, drawing out into ribbons and drifting slowly away. Here and there a tall trunk stands stark and clear, but the wood is in shadow, for the moon is under a cloud. As* ÆLFRIDA *finishes her song, the cloud passes and a shaft of bright moonlight falls full upon* ÆTHELWOLD, *asleep at some distance from her, on a bed of emerald moss.*]

ÆLFRIDA

Ah!
What lieth yonder?
[*She lifts her hand to her lips and, staring at him, crushes out the torch in the wet leaves. Then, leaning forward, she looks at him intently.*]
'Tis the play of the moon on the moss.

Nay.
It twisteth not awry,
Nor melteth into fallen bough and moss and moonlight.
[*She looks at him for a long time, then with a sigh lays her hand upon her heart.*]
Whatever thou art,
I would thou wert the thing thou seemest,
So lord-like,
So lank and young!

Mazèd in drowsy sleep he lies,
The small and childish locks about his brow
Bright in the moon, and crimpèd by the wet wind.

Beware! Beware!
No moonlight, but the wanton craft of witches
Hath wrought him!

Ah, that black evil hath might to build so fair!

My heart hath seen him, too.

Oh, heart, be wise!
Else mayst thou love forever in hunger and tears
A golden husk!

I must go quickly away from here.
I know, I know I am lost if I bide.
My head is wild with dreams.

Oh, darling thing unblest,
How shall I leave thy side?
Now is his hand in shadow.
Moon, how thou stridest,
And whippest up the clouds to foam about thy knees!
Ah, could I make him some way mine,
Ere night like a raven go flapping to another wood!
Some way, some way mine!

[*She steals closer and bends above him.*]

Oh, lief and lovely ghost,
When thou shalt wake, forget not—
As of a dream, yet ruddier than thy day—
Once in a mossy grove and moon-besprent
A breathing maiden
Did dearly, dearly love thee!
Oh, take with thee away,
To warm a little thy damp and chilly house,

This kiss I give thee,
For 'tis thine, 'tis thine!—
And heaven shrive my soul.

[*She kisses him swiftly, and rises to her feet.*]

ÆTHELWOLD [*In his sleep*]

Oh no!
Oh no!

ÆLFRIDA [*Moving fearfully away*]

Shield me, all Saints and Martyrs!

ÆTHELWOLD

[*Starting up, with his hand on his sword*]

Who's there?
[ÆLFRIDA *stands in the shadow of the trees, motionless. He goes up and peers into the shadow.*]
I see thee where thou hidest, and my sword hath got the wind of thee!
Slinking shadow, come forth into the light!—
Else mayst thou sing "Truce! Truce!" to the harrier-hawk
That whetteth his bill on thy thigh-bone!

ÆLFRIDA

I' the name o' God,
Forbear!
[*She comes out into the light. Her dark cloak falls from her shoulders. In her pale robe, silvered by the moon, she stands watching him guardedly, poised for flight.*]



ÆTHELWOLD [*Slowly*]

What art thou?
What art thou, that hither from thy hollow hill art come
To work me woe?

Ah, and what spell is this upon me,
That I see thee through a glistering web
More softly bright
Than the silver stole of the moon?

Oh, thing unearthly fair,
What hast thou wrought upon me whiles I slept?
Whiles I slept. . . .
Ah, could I sink again into a dream I had. . . .
I think I knew thee better there.
Yea, so.
I knew thee there.

ÆLFRIDA [*In a low voice, turning and facing him*]
Thou knewest me never, never in this world,
Nor I thee.
All this hath the moon done.
And the moon will set.

Tomorrow's sun will find me what I am,
An earthly maiden, watching the cold sea
Go out and come in.
Tomorrow's sun will find thee riding a far road,
An earthly man, light-hearted and free.
The sound of thy horse's hooves and the creaking of
the saddle-leather
Will mind thee of many things,
But never of me.

Farewell.
We shall not meet again
In any wood,
In any weather.

ÆTHELWOLD

Oh, Godes Son!
How wounding fair thou art!
The sight of thee
Is like a knife at the heart.
Of thee the sight or the sound,
The turn of thy head, thy speaking,
Is like a thing found,
To a man seeking.

ÆLFRIDA

Too bright, too bright are thine eyes!
Stare not so upon me with thy wide-open eyes!
[*She covers her face with her hands.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

Now will I learn by heart thy hands
And the wanton way of thy hair, where thou bindest it under.
[*She takes down her hands in confusion.*]
Nay, be not wroth with me;
Nor chide mine eyes.
Two children are mine eyes before thy shining wonder.

ÆLFRIDA [*Catching up her cloak from the ground*]

I must be gone from here.
Farewell.
Forget thou sawest me ever.

ÆTHELWOLD

Forget thee—
Men do not live so long!

ÆLFRIDA [*Faintly*]

Be still . . . be still . . .
Oh, is it sleep or death whose drowsy mouth
Draineth my heart of blood? . . .
[*She looks into his eyes.*]
Let me go . . . let me go. . . .

ÆTHELWOLD

No, no—no, no—
Ah, thy sweet look,
Thine arrowy, sweet, sweet look!
'Tis sunk to the feather in my heart. . . .
Pluck it forth! Pluck it forth! . . .
Oh, God, what aileth me?
[*He turns and leans his forehead against the trunk of the tree by which he is standing. Presently he turns and looks at her.*]
Thou—knowest thou aught of love, and how it taketh a man?
Thinkest thou I am in love with thee?

ÆLFRIDA [*Faintly*]

I would it were so. . . .

ÆTHELWOLD [*Staring at her*]

I must be near thee or die.
[*He comes blindly toward her and takes her in his arms.*]

ÆLFRIDA

I am lost. . . . I am swept out to sea. . . .
[*She lifts her face to his. He kisses her. They stand for a moment embraced.*]
How thou shakest!
Art thou a-cold, my dear?

ÆTHELWOLD

Yea . . . nay . . . I know not . . .
I am a tree in a storm. . . .
[*He turns from her, clinging to her hand, and sinks down upon the fallen tree.*]

ÆLFRIDA

[*She spreads her cloak hastily over the log and seats herself upon it beside him. She touches his cheek.*]

Thy cheek is brown and smooth,
Like the rind of a nut
New bursten from his burr.
I have not seen thy like.

ÆTHELWOLD

The like of thee
Sings not nor blossoms.

Yet, ah, not wind nor bee
Nor any earthly wight
Hath seen what I see,
Nor hath any man heard from his father's father in an old tale
The like of thee.

ÆLFRIDA

Ah, me, how frosty sweet the moonlight!

ÆTHELWOLD

Icy sweet on thy mouth of ripened haws the moonlight. . . .
Belovèd . . . belovèd. . . .

ÆLFRIDA

Oh, darling head, shut out the moonlight from my mouth,
And kiss me in thy shadow!

ÆTHELWOLD

Drink, drink in haste my breath,
Ere it be swallowed up by thievish Death!
[*He kisses her. Presently her head falls back against his shoulder.*]

ÆLFRIDA [*Drowsily*]

O deep wood, unstill with small sounds,
Be kinsman to our love.
Nor let the chilly frost with his hoar rime
Creep up, creep up upon the drowsy summer
For yet a little time.
[*Suddenly she puts her arms about* ÆTHELWOLD'S *neck and shrinks against him.*]
Ah, love, I fear a little, I fear, I fear
This fire we so recklessly kindled alone in the woods at night!
Hungry, hungry about us on every hand
It leaps and spreads among the trees!

Far off in the deep wood the grazing stag,
With listening hoof and antlers high,
Stands now with blinded eyes ablaze,
Bewildered in its light!

I love thee so! I love thee so!
[*She takes his face in her hands and kisses him. Then sleepily, once more, her head falls back against his shoulder.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

Ah, could we hide us here in a cleft of the night,
And never be found!

ÆLFRIDA

Lost, lost,
Forgotten and lost,
Out of sight, out of sound!

ÆTHELWOLD

Letting the sun ride by, with his golden helmet,
And all his flashing spears and his flags outstreaming,—
Ride by, ride by, ride by,
Shaking the ground!

ÆLFRIDA

And never be found!

ASE [*Off-stage, calling*]

My lady!

ÆLFRIDA [*Startled, looks up. Pause*]

'Tis Ase.
'Tis my woman. I'd clean forgot her.

Yea, and my father . . . and my father's house. . . .
And all my life. . . .
I'd clean forgot.
I must be gone.
I do not know thy name.

ÆTHELWOLD

Nor I thy name.
"Æthelwold," I hight.

ÆLFRIDA

"Æthelwold."
'Tis the first time I speak thy name.
But not the last time.

ÆTHELWOLD

Nay.
And thou?

ASE [*Off-stage, calling*]

Ælfrida!
[*At the sound of this name* ÆTHELWOLD *starts.*]

ÆLFRIDA

I must be gone!
"Ælfrida," I hight.
Is it uncouth to thee—"Ælfrida"?

ÆTHELWOLD [*Shaken*]

No. I have heard the name.

I hight—*I am called.*

ÆLFRIDA

I must be gone.
I will come back in a little while.
[*She turns to go.*]

ÆTHELWOLD [*With dread*]

Ælfrida!

ÆLFRIDA [*Turning back*]

'Tis the first time thou sayst my name.
But not the last time.

ÆTHELWOLD

No.

ÆLFRIDA

What will my lord?

ÆTHELWOLD

Thy father—?

ÆLFRIDA

My father? What of him?

ÆTHELWOLD

How hight he?

ASE [*Off-stage*]

My lady! My lady!

ÆLFRIDA

Good lack! She'll be running hither!
"Ordgar," my father hight.
He is the Thane of Devon.

God be wi' thee.
Bide here, and I will come again.
[*She runs out, left.*]

ÆTHELWOLD [*After a pause*]

I have not heard aright.
Never, since first the moon shone down upon the head of man,
Hath such an evil been wrought.
"Ordgar, my father hight. He is the Thane of Devon."
Oh no! Oh no!
I hear my tongue.
It shouteth, "No!"
But my heart saith not a word;
It only weeps.

"Ordgar, my father hight. He is the Thane of Devon."

Oh, dreadful dream, burst, burst! and let me out of thee!

There is no way out.
Cursèd be this day!
And naked of grass and blossoms from this night forth
The wreath of ground whereon in a breath of time
I found and lost my love!
[*He sinks down upon the fallen tree and drops his head in his hands.*]

[*Enter* MACCUS *from the right.*]

MACCUS

My lord, the horses are at hand, full of grass;

And hard by is a road well trodden, that like as not
Hath been there all night.

ÆTHELWOLD

Speakest thou to me, friend?
Look again:
Thou sawst me never.

MACCUS

I saw thee never so down-i'-the-mouth and bleachèd,
If that be thy drift.
Thou'rt peaked as a garfish.
In God's name, what hath worn thee down?

ÆTHELWOLD

The teeth of Sorrow. I am Sorrow's bone.

Done for. Wantonly, scurvily done for.
Death is twins; and stareth upon me from two sides.
Maccus, thou seest me driven by a foe against whose fell
My sword is tallow.
Come, let me lean upon thine arm.
I am an old man;
For I am gutted of hope.

MACCUS

My lord, my lord, what hath come over thee?

ÆTHELWOLD

I have seen her.
I have seen my lady.
My lady—and the King's.

MACCUS

God above! Oh, wretched boy!

ÆTHELWOLD

Take me away from here and set me on my horse.

MACCUS

Whither wendest thou?

ÆTHELWOLD

To Winchester.
Love, Love, how shall I wean me to thine ember-days?
To Winchester.
Ere she be coming back and calling me,
My throstle-throat! My lovely thing!
To Winchester . . . to Eadgar . . . to the King!
[*He runs out on the right, followed by* MACCUS. *The wood is quiet for a moment.*]

ÆLFRIDA [*Off-stage, calling*]

Æthelwold!
Ase, thou oaf, [*gayly*]
Canst thou not wield thy legs?

ASE [*Off-stage*]

I am numb with cold.
Frost-bit I am, from falling asleep i' the wooze.

ÆLFRIDA

Oh, Ase, when thou seest him, when thou seest him, girl. . . .
Words cannot build him,

How fair he is. . . .
[*Calling*]
Æthelwold!
[*Enter* ÆLFRIDA *on the left, followed by* ASE. ÆLFRIDA *stands for a moment looking about her.*]

ASE

Belike 'twas further on.

ÆLFRIDA

Nay, nay. 'Twas here.
[*Softly*]
Æthelwold!
[*She listens.*]

ASE

It was a dream, I tell thee.
I had a dream myself.

ÆLFRIDA [*Wildly*]

Ase, shall I choke thee,
Or wilt thou brank thy tongue?
[*Calling*]
Æthelwold!
[*She listens.*]
O God! how still it is, and empty here!
He is gone! He is gone!
I shall never see him more!
Woe, woe is me!
[*She falls sobbing upon the ground.*]

ÆTHELWOLD [*Off-stage*]

Out of my road!

MACCUS [*Off-stage*]

And see thee run to thy death?
Nay, but I'll hinder thee!

ÆTHELWOLD

Out of my furrow, or I plow thee under!
[*He rushes in, followed by* MACCUS.]
Ælfrida!
[*He takes her in his arms.*]

ÆLFRIDA

My liefest heart!

ÆTHELWOLD

Now ring, ring, ring, ye hammers of wrath
On all the anvils of Doom!
Not less than all thy lightnings, O up-heavèd Heaven,
Can singe me now!

ÆLFRIDA

What wild words are these?

ÆTHELWOLD

Thou . . . thou . . .
Tell thy sweet beads twice over for our love,
And I'll be with thee.
Maccus, two words—
A black one and a white one.
[*He crosses to* MACCUS.]
Maccus, if I may trust thee as of old—

MACCUS

Fear not, my lord.
When thou wert wise, I did a wise man's bidding
Now thou art mad, I follow thy lost wits
A-gathering wool.

ÆTHELWOLD

Maccus, go back unto the King.
And say to him as follows:
[*He pauses, then continues rapidly*]
That I have seen the maiden,
And found her nothing fair.
A comely maid enough, and friendly-spoken,
But nothing for the King.

MACCUS

'Tis done, my lord.

ÆTHELWOLD

Further say:
[*He hesitates.*]
That whereas the Thane of Devon, the lady s father,
Is rich in lands and kine,
And whereas the Lord Æthelwold,
But for the King's love—
[*He stops short; then continues*]—
Sparing the King's love, hath little else beside,—
The blessing of King Eadgar is besought
Upon the wedding of Lord Æthelwold
Unto the maid Ælfrida.

But nothing for the King—Compare with Eadgar's threat (Page 228) that if Æthelwold brings home a damsel who is not satisfactory, "*I'll wed thee to the wench!*"

MACCUS

'Tis done my lord.
[*He goes out on the right.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

'Tis done.
'Tis done.
[*He goes up to* ÆLFRIDA *and, taking her into his arms, looks steadfastly into her face.*]
Now shall I look no more beyond thine eyes.

CURTAIN

ACT III

Ordgar's house on the coast of Devonshire. The following spring. A large room, though smaller than the hall of Eadgar *in Act I, and built throughout of rough-hewn timber, the beams appearing enormously thick and strong. The windows are hardly more than loop-holes, the doors broad and low. In the left wall is a door leading out into a courtyard which incloses the kitchens, storerooms, and stables. Along this wall run several open shelves holding bowls and jugs of wooden and earthen ware. In the right wall, well toward the back, five broad steps of smooth stone lead up to a landing and the door of* Ælfrida's *bower. Further front along this wall is a large chest of carved oak. In the back, the main door of the house, a huge door taking up nearly half the wall space, stands open. Through it can be seen dark ledges and the sea. It is a bright, sunny morning. On a settle at the left* Ase *sits spinning with a distaff and spindle.* Æthelwold *stands beside the door in the back wall, looking out at the sea.*

Æthelwold

Ase, knowest thou where is thy lady?

Ase

Most likely with the steward, my lord,
What with the linen to buck,
And a new wench in.

Ælfrida [*Entering from the door at the left*]

Beshrew the house!
Full forty loaf-eaters,

Loaf-eaters—Men.

And not a churl among 'em that knoweth his chore!
[*She goes over to the chest and kneels by it, lifting out some rolls of colored linen. Her hair is down her back in two braids. She is wearing an apron.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

[*Going over to* ÆLFRIDA *and standing beside her*]
Ælfrida, when shall I speak with thee?
We are never alone.
Always this woman, twisting, twisting the spindle at her thigh,
Or thy father,
Or some one else.
And I have that on my heart that I must share with thee.
Come with me down to the shore!

ÆLFRIDA

What—now?

ÆTHELWOLD

Now. Now.

ÆLFRIDA

I know not how I can come now.
Morning's a busy time.

ÆTHELWOLD [*After a pause*]

Sweet heart . . .
What I was
Before I met thee
I forget.
What I am now

It needeth not a seer to see:
Thy hand,
Thy foot,
Love's churl.
Ælfrida, ere the last timber of my manhood be eaten through by love,
There's something I must tell thee!
Come with me down to the shore!

ÆLFRIDA [*Rising*]

Softly, softly, my lord.
Thou must not shout so.
I will come.
Do thou go before, and bide by the spar in the shingle.
I've but to yield the keys to Ase, and I'll be with thee.
[*She goes over to* ASE. ÆTHELWOLD *goes to the door and looks out at the sea.*]

ÆLFRIDA [*Giving* ASE *the keys*]

Ase, thou'lt find in the kitchen a fat wight,
Sucking her lip and cooling a pot of peas-broth,
Daft as a culver.
Run thither, ere she 'gin a-cooing to herself,
And set her to swilling the milk-pans.

ASE [*Rising*]

I'll handle her.
[*She goes out on the left.* ÆLFRIDA *returns to the chest and kneels by it, replacing the things she has taken out.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

The tide is swelling back,
Bringing the winter wrack,
And shoving the red weed up the stones.
I never leave thee, but I feel 'tis for a long time.
[*He turns and looks at her.*]
Ælfrida!
[*She looks around at him, still kneeling.*]
Lovest thou me?

ÆLFRIDA

Oh, ask me not of a morning if I love thee!—
When my mind is full of thimbles and churns!
I tell thee, so long as we bide here in my father's house,
I am my father's housekeeper,
And thou shalt see me seldom but as a warder of cupboards and chests
And a doler-out of heal-alls!
Body of me!
[*She rises, leaving some of the linen still on the floor.*]
Am I to bide forever here,
Like a winkle stuck to a stone,
And die in the house I was born in?
Sick and sick to death I am
Of the stink of fish on the wharves,
And the squawk of seagulls,
And the wind that blows always!

ÆTHELWOLD

Oh, God!—the wind that blows always!
Would I could put an arrow in the heart of the wind,
And bring his beating feathers down!

On that day,
On that day when the wind lay dead,
And the sea was smelt and smooth,
A man might think his thought out.

ÆLFRIDA

Thy speech is a thread full of knots.
And thy deed likewise.
I see thee go forth into the wood to hunt,
And come home like a baby with a wilted blossom in thy fist.
Thy helmet is a house for spiders,
And thy saddle is cold.
Where is that Æthelwold
That was the King's darling,
And the dread of the Dane,
And my true love?

ÆTHELWOLD [*In a pained voice*]

Ælfrida!
[*He turns away his face.*]

ÆLFRIDA

[*Coming up to him and putting her arms about his neck*]
My dear! My dear!
Take me away from this God-forgotten spot!

ÆTHELWOLD

[*Quietly, removing her arms gently from about his neck*]

Thy speech is a thread full of knots.—Your talk is confused and useless.

I will.
And that ere sundown.
[*Enter from the left* ORDGAR. ORDGAR *is a short, thick-set man of fifty, with the red face and neck of a man who for years has eaten well and been much out of doors. He is shrewd, but slow-witted. His manner is by turns hearty and surly.*]

ORDGAR

Good morrow, daughter and son!

ÆLFRIDA

Good morrow, my father.

ÆTHELWOLD

God give thee good day.
God give us all a good day.

ORDGAR

'Tis weather like this will dry up the wooze
And give us the roads again.
They say that but for a stretch or two of puddle and addle,
And the swollen fords,
The way from here to Winchester's as clean as a new knife.
Ah, well, thou'lt soon be riding off to the King-Stool,
And my daughter with thee.

ÆLFRIDA [*Proudly and excitedly*]

Yea, so! And that ere sundown.

King-Stool—Throne; hence, to Court.

Shall we not, my lord?
Thou art the King's friend, and his foster-brother.
In Winchester we should be bidden to eat at the King's board;
And like as not have a house of stone with glass in the windows!
And I should be second to none but to the Queen that's dead.

ORDGAR [*To* ÆLFRIDA]

"A house of stone," thou sayst.
And what art thou to be sneezing at the house where thy mother gave birth to thee?
Do thou keep out of this.
[*To* ÆTHELWOLD]
My son, when thou hast again the King's ear,
Forget not to put a flea in it for me.

ÆTHELWOLD

I know. I know. I'll not forget.
I must go out now and have a word with my men.

ORDGAR [*Catching him by the sleeve*]

Say to the King:
"Thou hast in thy Thane Ordgar a good man and a knowing one
For Ealdorman of Wessex west of Wiltshire."

* *Forget not to put a flea in it for me*—*Say a good word for me.*
Ealdorman—*Commander in war and chief of the free assembly. (Note that this word is the origin of our word alderman.)*

ÆTHELWOLD

I know. I know. I'll tell him.
[*He goes out left.* ÆLFRIDA *goes to the chest and kneels there, putting back what linen remains on the floor.*]

ORDGAR [*To* ÆLFRIDA]

Art thou a wedded wife in sooth,
Or art thou still a maid?

ÆLFRIDA [*Calmly, without looking up*]

Thou knowest well I was wedded in Holy Church
Two sennights after Christ-His-Mass
[*Crossing herself*]
To Æthelwold, Earl of East Anglia.

ORDGAR

Then wherefore all this pranking of crimpèd hair
Adown thy back,
As thou wert still a silly girl?

ÆLFRIDA [*Closing the cover of the chest and rising*]

Still harping on that string!
One 'u'd think my hair were a rope to hang the King,
The fuss thou makest o't!

ORDGAR

That may all be.

Christ-His-Mass—Christmas.
Crimped hair adown thy back—Girls in those days cut their hair when they married.

But I wonder what folk say of thee,
Seeing thee with thy hair down.

ÆLFRIDA

They say, "What lovely hair!"

ORDGAR

Yea, gibe at thy father. It becomes thee well.
But I tell thee, a man that cometh to a cross-roads
Must turn his back upon the one way
To follow the other.
Thou, thou wouldst yield no thing,
Thou art that shrew-mouse of the world—a wedded woman
That will not settle down.

ÆLFRIDA [*Angrily*]

My hair is mine own, I tell thee!
And no man shall put the shears to it!
Though every wife in England and the Isles
Go callow as a sheep new-shorn!

ORDGAR [*Going toward the door in the back*]

Thou art a greedy woman,
And God hath his eye on thee.
[*He goes out.*]

ÆLFRIDA [*Furiously*]

Old mouthy man!
But I'll be shed of thee!
Let me but once set foot in Winchester,
I am East Anglia's Lady—and never more

The Thane of Devon's daughter!
[*Enter* ÆTHELWOLD *from the left.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

Ælfrida, canst thou be ready by low water
To take horse and be off?

ÆLFRIDA

To Winchester!

ÆTHELWOLD

No. Not to Winchester.

ÆLFRIDA

Oh, Æthelwold!

ÆTHELWOLD

Nay, wife. And tease me not.
I do beseech thee, be of one will with me,
Till we be well on the road.
Winchester, Winchester is a man's town,
Full of shouting.
There is nothing there for thee—for thee and me
Nothing there.
Later, belike—one day, not now. . . .
Next year—or the year after. . . .
But give me time.
[*He hesitates.*]
Wouldst thou be seen at the King-Stool in thy last-year's weeds?
Hast thou no need to buy thee somewhat—a smock, or a stole,

Some freak or other—some new-fangle thing—
Ere the ladies of the King's house look thee up and down?

ÆLFRIDA [*Thoughtful*]

It is true the only hood I have that halfway becomes me
Is worn no longer by the ladies of the town. . . .
And my pilch of spotted fell—I could do with a new one. . . .
But where shall I buy these things but in Winchester itself?
Gloucester hath nothing!

ÆTHELWOLD

Nay, nay. 'Twas some outlandish cheaping-stead
I had in mind.
Say . . . Ghent in Flanders.

ÆLFRIDA [*With astonishment and delight*]

Ghent in Flanders!
Great town of my many dreams!
Why, lo, thou—thither to fare,
That would I rathest of all things under the welkin!

ÆTHELWOLD

Even so I. Even so I.
I would liefer see the gray water widen 'twix us and England
Than aught I know.
[*Enter from the left* ASE.]

Outlandish cheaping-stead—*Foreign shopping center.*

ÆLFRIDA

Ase! Ase!
Drop thy burthen to the floor,
And let the pots boil over,
And the wenches drown in suds,
And do thou fly and lade my boxes and chests with all that's mine!

ASE

Fare we forth?

ÆLFRIDA

We leave this house tonight for Ghent in Flanders!

ÆTHELWOLD

God willing.

ASE

For Ghent in Flanders!
And half thy linen i' the lye-buck!
[*She hurries out, left.*]

ÆLFRIDA

Oh, Devon, Devon!
Farewell, thou bitter strand!

ÆTHELWOLD

England, farewell, farewell,
Thou green and rainy land.

ÆLFRIDA

Farewell to you, ye weeping fisherwomen,
Stopping your nets by the sea!
Ye shall behold me no more

ÆTHELWOLD

Dear land, farewell to thee.

ÆLFRIDA

Henceforth in sighing silk
And gossamer I go,
Chary days of grim and stingy winter,
Ye are broken, ye are strown!
Well come, thou singing high-day, thou blossomy
sweet summer,
Thou lovely land unknown!
Open thy gates, thou mighty cheaping-stead!
Let every shop and stall with wondrous wares be hung!

ÆTHELWOLD

Oh, let us wander far! Oh, let us live forever!
The world is wide, and we are hale, and we are young!
[*They stand with their arms about each other, looking out over the sea. The sound of rapid hoofbeats is heard from the courtyard without.* MACCUS *enters from the left, out of breath, and spattered with mud.*]

MACCUS

My lord! My lord Æthelwold!
[ÆTHELWOLD *and* ÆLFRIDA *turn.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

What wouldst thou?
[*In alarm*]
Maccus!
[*Striding over to him and taking him by the arm*]
Thou'st evil tidings!

MACCUS

The King is at our gates!

ÆTHELWOLD [*Crying out*]

'Tis come!

MACCUS

Up the road he is, a mile or two beyond the swineherd's cot,
With a great threat of men, talking and laughing and cooking breakfast.
At first I thought, "He hath got wind of it! Some blabbing ear-wig hath been at him!"
But nay, their talk was merry, and nothing evil in't.
Meseems he cometh not to bewray thee.
But only to bid thee good speed.

ÆTHELWOLD

God forgive me my sin!

MACCUS

God aside, what are we to do, my lord?

ÆLFRIDA

[*Who has caught the last words, coming forward*]
This ye are to do: ye are to make an end of all this humming and runing like two thieves in a hedge,
And tell me what is toward!

[ÆTHELWOLD *and* MACCUS *look at her without speaking.* MACCUS *bows his head and goes out, left.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

Oh, to be a fox in a trap!—
That I might gnaw my foot off and be free!

Lo, thou—down this road come riding through the
sunny morning,
Three dark riders abreast:
The King, and Shame, and Doom.

ÆLFRIDA

The King, thou sayst? Bound hither? To this house?—
And I in my barm-cloth!
[*She unties her apron.*]

ÆTHELWOLD

Yea, make thyself more fair!
[*He takes her by the shoulders.*]
Ælfrida, swear, swear—
Ere ever the waters rise,
And stop the mouth, and hide the eyes,
And Love be a shriek in the ear that hears nothing,
nothing!—
Swear thou wilt not forget the love that was between us,
How sweet it was.

ÆLFRIDA

Forget—our—love?
Art thou gone mad, to say it?

ÆTHELWOLD

Hark—Hearest thou nothing?

ÆLFRIDA

'Tis but the wave in the hollow ledge.
The tide is high.

ÆTHELWOLD

High tide. The sea is at a standstill.
The sea is at a loss which way to turn.
Woman! The mist that rises from the sea is not thy friend!
But for the mist, thou hadst been Queen of England!
[*Enter through the door in the back* ASE, *in time to hear these last words. She retreats softly and remains standing just outside the door, listening.*]

ÆLFRIDA

Thou art mad! Thou art mad!

ÆTHELWOLD

Hark what hath maddened me.

Hither I rode a little time ago . . .
A long time ago . . .
As henchman of the King,
On the King's business.
And this mine errand, lady—hearken well:
To seek, in the King's name,
And to woo, in the King's name,
And to betroth and pledge with the King's ring in the King's name,
Thee, thee, Ælfrida!—
Thee, but for the wretched love of a green and dizzy boy,

Queen of all Britain
And Lady of the Isles!

ÆLFRIDA

'Tis the long winter hath addled thy wits!
Me! Me! That have spent my days like a swallow,
Dipping in and out of a house in the eaves of the earth!
Me, Queen of Britain!

'Tis not true?

ÆTHELWOLD [*Wearily*]

Yea, my child. 'Tis true enough.
Thou knowest in what way we met.
So . . . when I knew thy name,
I lied to Eadgar, saying thou wert all unworthy of so high a stead,
Being little fair,
And took thee for myself.
Oh, the good smack of truth on the tongue again,
After a winter of lies!

ÆLFRIDA [*Coldly, after a short silence*]

Meseems, my lord, thou hast dealt wantonly by me,
And by my father,
And by the King.

ÆTHELWOLD

Thou under-sayst it.

ÆLFRIDA

Was there no time 'twix Candle Mass and Beltane

Beltane—*May Day.*

Thou mightst have told me this?

ÆTHELWOLD

Something always came in the way.

ÆLFRIDA [*Musingly*]

But for thee,
I had been Lady of England
And bride of him that was rowed by the eight kings on
the stream of Dee. . . .
'Tis wonderful. . . .

ÆTHELWOLD [*Passionately, turning on her*]

Sayst thou so?
Now, upon the Rood of Christ I swear,
He hath not got thee yet,
Nor shall he have thee whiles I live!
There never was a man so loved a woman
As I love thee.
Never in any world.
And that's to be reckoned with!
A year ago I had a good name among men.
Where is it now?
For love of thee, i' the swine-wash.
My plighted pledge—hang it for sale in the market,
Shall it fetch thee down a farthing? Nay.
And such a friend as I had. . . .
Ywis, in the Month of the Wolves I wedded thee,
And thou shalt rend me yet;
But mine thou wert ere ever I knew thy name—
And that's to be reckoned with!

Month of the Wolves—January.

There, there thou shinest like a sun, filling the room!
Make haste, and hide thee in a cloud from the King's eyes!
[*He stares at her fiercely. Suddenly, as he looks at her, his eyes narrow and he strikes his fist into the palm of his hand.*]
Yea, by the Tree, one path is left us!
And thou shalt tread it for my sake, and for the love that thou sworest!
Go now, and darken thy cheek with the sap of the walnut!
And dust thy hair with the meal of the wheat!
Be foul! Be bent! Be weathered!
And keep thy bower,
That none may see thee
But myself and the King.
Is it much to ask of thee—to dim for a short time only thy shining?—
Yet many a wife hath done as much and more,
To shield from death her man,
And him no better than me!

ÆLFRIDA

From death?

ÆTHELWOLD

Why, yea. What wouldst thou?
My life is not worth the life of a sheep-killing dog,
If thou go back on me.
But that is the least of my cares. For if thou go back on me,
Thou lovest me not.

And Death were a small thing then.
[*The sound of a hunting-horn is heard in the near distance.*]

ÆLFRIDA [*Bursting into tears*]

Oh, sorry me! That must keep my bower like a naughty
child,
The day the King comes!
Oh, sorry, sorry me!
That the King should see me looking loathsome,
With locks unkempt, and dusty with hateful meal!

Natheless
[*She wipes her eyes.*]
I will do it.
I go.
But thou—
Beshrew me, husband, thou lookest dreadful!
I' God's name, if thou wouldst blear the King's eye
Tease a little blood to thy cheek
And see to the thongs of thy hose!
Thou lookest like a man washed ashore.
[*She turns to go up the steps to her bower.*]
[*Enter from the back* ORDGAR, *very happy and excited.*]

ORDGAR

Daughter! Daughter! and thou—
Moping here!
Heard ye not the horn?

ÆTHELWOLD

I heard it.

ÆLFRIDA

I heard it.

[*The marching-song of* EADGAR'S *men is heard faintly.*]

ORDGAR

Hark! 'Tis the King! 'Tis Eadgar!
Out! Out! And meet him on the road!
[*To* ÆLFRIDA]
Thou, thou half-wit!
Wouldst have the King see thee looking like a bundle untied?
Go! Do on thy holy day weeds! And be quick about it!

ÆLFRIDA

Not I. I am sick. I swoon.
Ase! Ase!
I go to my bower. And I come not forth.
[*Enter* ASE, *and supports* ÆLFRIDA *up the steps toward the door in the right wall.*]

ORDGAR

I might have known it! Was ever so willful a nussy as thou!
Couldst thou not be sick of a fast-day?
Well—so much for thee, then.
[*To* ÆTHELWOLD, *wheedlingly, taking him by the arm and urging him toward the door in the back.*]
Thou, my son—knowest thou thou art my dear son?
Yea, I dote on thee. I do, i' sooth.

ÆTHELWOLD [*Turning his head*]
Ælfrida!

ORDGAR
Nay, let her sulk it out!
Mind thee—a little flea in's ear . . .
For Wessex west of Wiltshire!

ÆTHELWOLD
I know. I know. Ælfrida!

ORDGAR [*Drawing him through the door*]
Thou knowest! Ho, ho! Thou knowest!
Trust thee! What a day! What a day!
'Tis a great day for Devon!
[*They go out.*]
[ÆLFRIDA *and* ASE *are standing on the landing leading to* ÆLFRIDA'S *bower.*]

ASE [*Fiercely*]
Thou'lt do no such thing!

ÆLFRIDA
Oh, Ase, thou knowest not wherefore—

ASE
Yea, but I do, then. For I stood with mine ear to the door.
And such a shameful tale as I heard!
Hast thou no bone i' thy back?
Starch thy mind.
Thou must drop thy silver shell, to pick up the gold one.

[*They go out.*]

[*The hunting-horn is heard again, as if just outside the gate. A great shout goes up from the villagers off-stage.*]

VILLAGERS [*Off-stage*]

Eadgar! Eadgar! King of Britain and All the Lands About!
Be thou hale! Be thou hale! Be thou hale!

[*Reënter* THORED, *followed by servants and villagers.*]

THORED

This way! This way! If ye'd see the hairs in's beard!
Hither he comes, I tell you!

[*The villagers climb upon the settles and chests and into all accessible high places.*]

THORED [*To a man who is standing on a settle*]

Hoy, thou! Hop down from there! Leave un a bench, man!

BLACKSMITH'S WIFE [*To* BLACKSMITH]

Husband, husband, hoist the child to thy shoulder!
[*Looking up at the child*]
Ho, Wulfing! Where art thou now?

SECOND WOMAN SERVANT [*To* THORED'S *wife*]

Enid, thy cap's awry!

A YOUNG GIRL [*Leading a very old man*]

Nay, father, none shall hide him from thee.

[*To villagers in front of her*]
If you list, let him through.

THORED

Here thou art, old un! How are thine eyes?

OLD MAN

I shall see him. I shall see him.
God be thanked, that hath spared me to this day.

THORED

Here he comes! Now, then! Ready!
All together wi' the "Eight Kings o' Dee"!

VILLAGERS

[*Grouped on the left of the stage and facing the door in the back, singing*]
Malcolm of Cumberland, where art thou?—
Swinking at the oar, swinking at the oar!
Malcolm of Cumberland, where art thou?—
A-rowing of King Eadgar on the Stream o' Dee!
[*At the end of the stanza, enter* EADGAR *with his arm about* ÆTHELWOLD, *in conversation with him. They are followed by* MACCUS, *other lords of* EADGAR'S *retinue, persons of* ORDGAR'S *household, etc.*]

VILLAGERS

Eadgar! Eadgar! Eadgar!
King of the English folk and Lord of the Isles!

EADGAR

God shield all here.

VILLAGERS

Well come, well come to Devon!
Kinsman and King, be hale!

ORDGAR

My King, if thou wilt do me the worship to break bread
in my house—

EADGAR

Nay, nay, I bid thee. We broke our fast but now, and
heartily.
Did we not, friends?

CYNRIC

Yea, so. Full as a tick are we all.

EADGAR [*To* ÆTHELWOLD]

In sooth, I did not think when last I saw thee
I should see thee next a wedded man!
[*He seats himself upon the bench, left, and draws* ÆTHELWOLD *down beside him.*]
Hast heard: there's a deal of barking and running
about
Beyond the Severn?
Oh yea.
But said I: I ride not into Wales, but I ride by way of
the shore,
And greet my brother ere the month be out.

Knowest thou, we have not met sithen St. Michael's
Day?

Time flieth, 'tis said; but when I am afar from thee, friend,
He flieth with a wounded feather.

Yea, thou sorry knave!—and thou—
Thou hast not given me one thought
In all these giddy months!

ÆTHELWOLD

Not a day goes by
But I think of thee.

EADGAR

It warmeth my heart to hear it.

ÆTHELWOLD [*Feverishly*]

Full oft I think—I think of the time when we were lads!
My mother's house in Mercia—
Dost mind thee, Eadgar, how the sun came through the door?
Meseems it never rained in those days!

EADGAR

'Tis a long time sithen.
[*He is silent, lost in thought.*]
Yea, my Lord Daft-Head—yea, my Lord Soft-Heart, it was like thee
To wed a maid no other man would have. . . .
But [*hastily*] I deem the tale hath fattened in the telling!
Howe'er it be.

My mind is set to love her for thy sake,
Though she be less fair than some.
Good sooth, a lissome body and a flashing eye,
These be not all!
I ween she hath a warm heart and a true heart,
And loveth thee more than well.

ÆTHELWOLD [*In a strained voice*]

I thank thee, Eadgar.
[*He rises to his feet suddenly.*]
To ride into Wales, with a spear in the hand again!
And a shout in the blood again!
And an empty mind. . . .
[*He sinks down upon the bench.*]

EADGAR [*To* ÆTHELWOLD]

Lad, let me look at thee.
[*Slowly, shaking his head*]
Say what ye will, 'tis little a man knows of his friend.
Even his hound shareth not its dream with him.
And thou and I—we have been long asunder.

Yea, yea—'tis a long time sithen.

Æthelwold, how is it with thee, lad?
In sooth and earnest tell me.
For thou hast in thine eyes a shadow that squeezeth my heart.
Now then. This wife of thine—where is she?
Trimming herself, I ween;
Doing on her arm-rings.

ÆTHELWOLD

Nay. . . .
My wife is ailing. . . .
She cannot leave her bower.
Wilt thou be kind,
And wend thee thither with me,
To bid her good day?

EADGAR

Ailing, thou sayst? Why, man, I'm sad to hear that!
Ywis, lad, let us thither, and give her the gift I brought.
'Tis a wee thing, but belike 'twill gladden her eye.
[*They rise.* EADGAR *puts his arm about* ÆTHELWOLD'S *shoulders. They take a few steps across the stage to the door of* ÆLFRIDA'S *bower. The door suddenly opens.* ÆLFRIDA *enters, and stands on the landing.* ASE, *from without, quietly closes the door.* ÆLFRIDA *is dressed in a robe of richly embroidered silk. Her arms and hands are heavy with bracelets and rings of enamel and gold; she wears earrings and a necklace. Her hair is released from its braids and flows softly over her shoulders; about her forehead is a narrow fillet of gold. She is very pale, but so amazingly beautiful that even the villagers, who are accustomed to the sight of her, gaze at her admiringly.* GUNNER *and* CYNRIC *stare at her, open-mouthed, then exchange glances and turn their eyes upon* EADGAR. EADGAR *slowly lets fall his arm from* ÆTHELWOLD'S *shoulder.*]

ÆTHELWOLD [*Crying out*]

Ah, Ælfrida!



EADGAR

So. . . .
So. . . .
[*He looks from* ÆLFRIDA *to* ÆTHELWOLD *in silence.*]
Why, then [*slowly*], my life hath been but a heaping
of sticks
Under an empty pot.
Soft—let me get my bearings.
In this light, no tree is where it stood.

Yea, in this wood
I must seek behind me what I hear before me.
And hold my bow with my other hand.
[*He is silent a moment.*]
To whom shall I hearken now, where four roads meet?
In the church, or in the moot of wise men
Shall any tongue speak sooth?
Whom shall I set at the head of my fighters in an evil time?
What hand shall I take?
Yea, for if thy tongue be forkèd, Æthelwold,
Then from sea to sea my kingdom hisses!—
And not a head is reared, but to strike at my heel.
I have broken my back to make a home for the slay-worm;
And kept the foe from her nest, that she might hatch her speckled brood.
[*He is silent again*]
What of my hope, then, and my high dreaming?
'Twas not for this I wrought, swinking and sweating like a hind at mine unwieldy char.
Like a hind? why, lo, ye,—the plowman coming home from the field at evening to his hearth and his ale
Hath stood to stare with open mouth upon me,
Still, still, in the failing light,
Hewing and heaving,
Setting stone upon stone,
Building England!

I must seek behind me—*I must beware of deception.*
Tongue be forkèd—*A snake's tongue is forked; hence, evil, treacherous.*
What of my hope—*Compare Eadgar's feelings with those of King Arthur when he learned that Lancelot had deceived him.*

Idle, idle, all.

Wretched land, upon what hollow rafters fair to the eye
May not thy roof rest!

[*To* ÆTHELWOLD]

Thou . . . thou . . .
I cannot take it in.
My mind, that hath been fed so long on the sweet fare
of utter trust in thee,
Smells at this meat,
And turns away.

ÆTHELWOLD [*In anguish*]

Eadgar, Eadgar, what we have left to say must be
quickly said!—
For lo, with thy sorrow and mine in the same room
The world heels over!
That hath been which could never be.
Here we stand at last, we three.
But the wind is too strong. We cannot hear each other
shout.
Did Love call out
When the wave went over his head?
For Love was one of us.
And I do not see him.

Do ye get what I say, Eadgar? Ælfrida? No?
[*He looks from one to the other beseechingly.* EADGAR
stands with folded arms and immovable countenance;

For Love was one of us. And I do not see him.—Æthelwold might have said, "When did your love for me die?"

Ælfrida's face is whiter than linen, but she does not look at Æthelwold.]

So.

Shake your heads and laugh.

Let it go.

[*He draws his short sword, a weapon not much larger than a dagger. Several of* Eadgar's *men step forward.*]

Æthelwold [*In a loud voice*]

Stand back from me!

Let no man start from his stead!

[Eadgar *lifts his hand, motioning his men to do nothing.* Æthelwold *goes to the foot of the steps and looks up at* Ælfrida. *She is frightened for herself and crouches back against the door.*]

Æthelwold [*Gently*]

Nay, nay—

Fear not, my dear.

I would not harm thee.

[*He looks steadfastly into her face.*]

'Tis for myself.

[*He stabs himself and falls near the foot of the steps.*]

Ælfrida [*With her hands over her eyes*]

Oh no! Oh no!

Maccus [*Who has caught* Æthelwold *as he fell*]

Boy,

Was it for this I kept thy weapon bright?

ÆLFRIDA

[*Creeping fearfully down the steps and looking down at* ÆTHELWOLD]
God in heaven,
How he bleeds!

MACCUS [*Bitterly*]

He bleeds.
This that thou seest, splashed out in the dust like a
bucket of kitchen slop,
Is a man's most dear blood.
He bleeds.
Stand back, pretty lady.
Look to thy weeds.
[ÆLFRIDA *draws back her dress instinctively and shrinks against the steps.*]
I would not have thee foul this blood.
[*He turns away from her and looks intently into* ÆTHELWOLD'S *face.*]
My lord, my lord—speak!
Art thou there within thee yet,
Or art thou fled?

EADGAR [*Who has not moved from where he stood*]

Nay, Maccus. Lay him down. Lay him down.
What man hath met the thrust of Æthelwold
And spoke again?
He will not answer thee.
Nor me.
Not ever.

ÆLFRIDA [*Sobbing*]

Oh, most wicked me!
[*Bending over him*]
Æthelwold!

MACCUS [*Fiercely, half-rising*]

Stand back!
Or by the Body I'll do thee an evil!
For I hate thee with a full heart!
[*She cowers away from him, and sinks down upon the steps, weeping.*]

EADGAR

[*Coming forward and looking down at* ÆTHELWOLD]
Liest thou there in sooth?
[ÆLFRIDA *bursts into bitter sobbing.*]

EADGAR

Have done, Ælfrida.
Thou hast not tears enow in thy narrow heart
To weep him worthily.
Wherefore have done.

Nor all of us here,
Nor all of England weeping,
Should weep his worth,
That was so young and blithe and bold,
Whom the thorn of a rose hath slain.

Wherefore let us hoard our tears for a little sorrow,
And weep not Æthelwold at all.

[GUNNER, CYNRIC, WULFRED *and other lords come slowly forward, and stand about the body of* ÆTHELWOLD. *Looking down at him, they chant, together with* EADGAR, *the Lament for the Untimely Dead.*]

CHORUS OF ALL THE PEOPLE

Woe—lo—woe!
Was it the wind in the tree?
He that spoke but now is no longer in the room.
Forth-farèd is he.

EADGAR

So. Bear him softly hence.
And bury him deep, with his warm sword beside him.
Doughty of heart was he.
This day hath he dared two kings:
Myself and Death.
[GUNNER, CYNRIC, WULFRED *and* BRAND *take up the body of* ÆTHELWOLD *and bear it slowly out through the door, followed by* INGILD *and the other lords.*]

CHORUS OF PEOPLE

Woe—lo—woe!
Hearest thou the wind in the tree?
He that spoke but now is no longer in the room.
Forth-farèd is he.

CURTAIN

Part IV

COMPARATIVE STUDY

COMPARATIVE STUDY

Introduction

IN any study of *The Idylls of the King* and *The King's Henchman,* there leap to mind patent likenesses of background, story, and theme. Both are laid in Anglo-Saxon England in the early days of chivalry, the days of medievalism and romance. Both tell of the theft of love: the trusted emissary of the king, his all-but blood brother, sent to bring the king's betrothed to him, falls himself under her spell. Both have in common three important themes. The first is the code of chivalry. The second is love, the praise of love's beauty, betrayal, heartache. And lastly, underlying *The Idylls,* and briefly touched on in *The King's Henchman,* is the third, the striving of each ruler to build a better world, one where happiness, security, and promise of the future may flower; and to each, betrayal through love brings defeat.

These three themes—chivalry, love, a better world—have long been the province of poetry. The days of chivalry and romance are a perennial delight to the escapists, a source of light irony to realists. Variations on the theme of love are as eternally new as they are ageless. Man's effort to build a better world springs from the ashes of each failure, flares, sinks, and flares again, showing to each new age a new face of hope.

It is as much this community of themes, as it is the likenesses of plot that bring together these two classics for the study and delight of "the young of all ages."

The Three Themes: *Chivalry, Love, and Utopia*

The Days of Chivalry and Romance

Though both stories are laid in the early Middle Ages, they are colored with the concepts of chivalry that grew up somewhat later, Tennyson's appreciably more than Miss Millay's.

The days of feudalism, those centuries roughly from the fall of Rome to the Renaissance, have been called the "Dark Ages" because intellectual, scientific, and political progress were slight. Yet through them runs the glowing thread of chivalry. Because its contributions to the moral and social code of the ages that followed it—even to the present—have been so great, because its customs and trappings were so delightful, lovers of romance have always turned with pleasure to the tales of chivalry.

What is chivalry? The dictionary defines it as "the code of disinterested courtesy, bravery, and magnanimity as practised first by the knights of feudal times." To this definition may be added one further element, a high sense of personal honor.

In the days of chivalry, boys of noble families served during their youth as pages in the Courts of kings; then, grown to manhood, were knighted in a solemn and beautiful ceremony at which they pledged themselves to "love God, right wrong, and follow the king." From this code flowered deeds of great bravery. Personal combat in jousts, group combat in tournaments, taught a knight to ride well, wield a lance with power, ply the deadly sword with grace and art. But jousts and tournaments were the lighter side; they were mock combats only, despite the dangers involved. No knight was held in esteem unless he undertook his share of hazardous missions to save a maiden in distress, to rout out and bring to punishment a band of robbers, to join his comrades in battle against a heathen king. Fighting was his business

in life; it was difficult and dangerous but full of adventure. At it, he proved his right to be known as a man of courage.

But he must also prove himself a man of honor. His honor rested upon keeping his word and playing fair. A pledge or a promise, he must keep at all costs. Moreover, he must be magnanimous. That meant giving equal odds to his opponent, showing generosity to a defeated enemy, and being helpful—despite personal hazard—to all who were in distress. A boy's belief today that it is not right to "kick a fellow when he's down" comes to us from the days when a knight held it dishonorable to take an unfair advantage. To the knight of chivalry, a man's worth was measured as truly by his sense of honor as by his courage, never was it measured by the sharpness with which he outwitted another.

It is natural that men bred to such standards of conduct should idealize womanhood. Women were beautiful—and fragile; they must be cared for, and all honor paid them. Gentleness of manner and all the arts of courtesy grew out of this.

With bravery, honor, and courtesy the standards of conduct, what was lacking to make the Middle Ages a perfect time? Only this: chivalry was the code of knighthood, of the noble and the privileged. The common man knew none of its responsibilities, it is true, but also none of its glories. His portion was labor and obedience, too often accompanied by poverty and hardship.

Yet the fine tradition of chivalry, ripening through the spacious centuries following feudalism, has enriched the code of all men—regardless of class—whose purpose is to live a decent, good life in kindliness and amity with their fellows.

Love

The poet who has not sung of love is a *rara avis;* the man or woman who has not known or dreamt of it is rarer still.

Hence so common, yet overwhelming, an experience will show as various a form as mankind itself. It is like pease porridge; some take it one way, some another. Love as it is seen in these two classics—whether the pure love of Elaine, the guilty love of Lancelot, or the troubled love of Æthelwold—has been called romantic love. It dwells on the heights. It can be found there today, too; romantic love belongs to no century alone. Through the ages it has engendered deeds of great heroism, and, no less, of great evil.

But love has its lighter side as well. The love philtre has often contained a drop of this-and-that not wholly romance: of laughter, mockery, irony, humor, bitterness, and even the humdrummery of everyday. Some like the potion undiluted, some tinctured. It makes good telling either way; that is why poets flourish and novelists wax successful. Watch for these lighter touches, too, in these poems.

Building a Better World

There probably has been no age in the history of literature that has not yielded at least one Utopia, by whatever name. The hope of building a better world, here upon this planet, is an ever-recurring theme. Long ago it was said, "Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." Today we are equally concerned with the hope, though we may call it by other names: a new deal, social justice, enfranchising the disinherited.

The shape of the dream, of the vision, differs but little over the centuries, though the means sought for its accomplishment may. In the *Urbs Beata* of all utopias are found men rooted in goodwill toward their fellows, men for whom the values of the spirit transcend those of the marketplace, men who find in sacrifice for an ideal, the supreme fulfillment.

We in democratic America—though humanly we have

not always held to this vision—know that our country was founded upon it. We know it as the soil out of which we have grown. We know it as the soil out of which will come that future America to which we are pledged. And wisely we recognize that much still remains to be done to close the distance between the vision and the fact.

Problems in Comparison

1. Make a list of all the elements of likeness in the two plots. Note the major differences. Can you account for them?
2. Make comparative character studies for one pair of the following. Justify your statements by reference to events or by quotations from the text:
 a. Arthur and Eadgar: Which seems to you more kingly? How alike are they in their purposes? Their sorrow? Have you a preference?
 b. Lancelot and Æthelwold: Wherein are they alike? At what season of the year does each meet the woman he loves? How does the season contribute to their falling in love? What effect has consciousness of guilt upon each? Do you feel that one is more guilty than the other? If so, justify your conclusion.
 c. Guinevere and Ælfrida: Which seems to you the more knowledgeable and worldly? Which betrayed her husband the more gravely? Which do you think suffered the more deeply? Wherein are they alike?
3. Compare the stories as to background, including the times, customs, language, dress, etc.
4. Which story is told more romantically; which more realistically? Explain how you came to your conclusion.
5. Make a study of the references to the supernatural in each of the stories. Write a report on your findings.

6. Can you find descriptions of the English countryside in each story? If so, bring them together for comparative study.
7. Select your favorite passages of poetic beauty from each. If you prefer the poetry of one work to that of the other, try to find your reasons and explain them.
8. Do you find mention in both stories of the same flowers, trees, herbs, animals? See how long a list you can discover. Illustrate if you can by your own sketches, copied from dictionaries, encyclopedias or other books, or by clippings cut from old newspapers or magazines. (Do not cut up books for this purpose.)
9. Copy, or secure an illustration of, a knight in armor. Label the various parts of his accoutrement.
10. Compare the songs in the two stories. Have you any preference? Try to secure a copy of the score of Deems Taylor's operatic setting for *The King's Henchman.* If you can sing, plan to sing one of the songs. If you are interested in composing music, try to create a musical setting for one of the songs in the *Idylls.*
11. Make your own anthology of poems or short prose selections dealing with one of the three themes: chivalry, love, the hope of a better world to live in.

PART V

STUDY HELPS AND EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Study Helps

THE COMING OF ARTHUR

1. With what decision is Leodogran faced in this idyll?
2. What was the condition of England at the opening of the story? How had that condition arisen?
3. On what occasion did Arthur first see Guinevere? What effect did she have on him? How was it that she did not recognize him as Arthur, the king? What do we learn of Arthur's character at this point?
4. What pledge do Arthur and Lancelot make each other? How important does Arthur feel this pledge to be? What do we learn of his character here?
5. What causes Leodogran to hesitate in giving Guinevere to Arthur as his wife? From whom does he ask advice and help? What finally helps him to make up his mind? What is his decision?
6. Who was sent to escort Guinevere to Arthur's Court? At what season of the year?
7. Why are the Roman lords present at Arthur's Court? What answer does Arthur give them? How do Arthur's knights take this answer?
8. What do the last two lines in the idyll tell you of Arthur's success?
9. Who has helped Arthur to overcome the heathen and to build a strong and united kingdom? What name is given to the group? What is the significance of this name? How did you feel as they took the oath?

VOCABULARY BUILDING

Did you know all of these words before you read *The Coming of Arthur*? What does each mean? Use them in sentences of your own.

1. *akin*	4. *cleaved*	7. *harried*	10. *travail*
2. *assailed*	5. *colleaguing*	8. *puissance*	11. *vassals*
3. *azure*	6. *pavilion*	9. *realm*	12. *yore*

If you do not know the meanings of the words listed above, you will find them defined in the Glossary at the back of this book.

QUOTATIONS WORTH REMEMBERING

Line 247. *A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas.*
Line 508. *The old order changeth, yielding place to new.*

DID YOU NOTE THESE DESCRIPTIONS?

Tennyson is a master of descriptive phrases. Write the simple meaning of each and then compare your statement with the original. Note how much more effective Tennyson's statement is because of his use of pictures, color words, imaginative comparisons.

Lines 10-12. *And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,*
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.
Line 121. *So like a painted battle the war stood silenced.*
Lines 370-371. *Descending thro' the dismal night—a night*
In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost.

GARETH AND LYNETTE

1. What is Gareth's great desire at the opening of this idyll? What is his mother's attitude? What is the outcome?
2. What do we learn of Arthur's character from the way he hands out justice in court?
3. When Gareth asks his first boon, what is Arthur's reaction? Kay's? Lancelot's? What do we learn of Gareth's character during his vassalage?
4. Why does Gareth want his rank kept secret at the time he goes to the assistance of Lynette? How does Lynette feel about his assignment to the task?
5. What do we learn of Gareth's skill in his encounter with Sir Kay? How does this foreshadow his encounters with the four brothers?

6. Why do you think Tennyson tells us the story of Gareth's encounter with the baron and the robbers? Do you notice any change in Lynette's attitude toward Gareth here?
7. Tell of Gareth's encounter with each of the three brothers. Include also descriptions of the setting, the pavilions, and the appearance of each knight. What happened after the first fight that misled the other brothers?
8. Why did Lancelot fight Gareth? How did Gareth take the outcome? How did Lynette?
9. Why did Lancelot not undertake the fight with the fourth brother? What help did he give Gareth? What is the strange outcome?
10. Trace Lynette's change of attitude toward Gareth. Compare the songs.
11. How does Tennyson's conclusion to the story differ from Malory's? Which do you like better and why?

ADDING TO YOUR VOCABULARY

How many of these words that you found in *Gareth and Lynette* did you know before? Write sentences using these words. If you don't know the meaning of any of them, you will find a complete Glossary at the back of this book in which these and many of the other words in this book are defined.

1. *assay*
2. *appal*
3. *athwart*
4. *cloven*
5. *caitiff*
6. *carrion*
7. *cope*
8. *craven*
9. *crupper*
10. *fealty*
11. *felon*
12. *fluent*
13. *jousts*
14. *keystone*
15. *inveterately*
16. *knave*
17. *mien*
18. *palfrey*
19. *petulant*
20. *precipitancy*
21. *prodigious*
22. *proffered*
23. *quest*
24. *ravage*
25. *vacillating*

QUOTATIONS FOR MEMORIZING

Here are several beautiful thoughts from *Gareth and Lynette* that are well worth memorizing:

Lines 116-118. *Follow the Christ, the King,*
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King—
Else, wherefore born?
Line 136. *Who should be king save him who makes us free?*
Line 141. *Who walks thro' fire will hardly heed the smoke.*
Line 162. *The thrall in person may be free in soul.*
Lines 1229-1230. *Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time.*
Victor from vanquish'd issues at the last.
Line 1291-1292. *Wonders ye have done; miracles ye cannot.*
Line 1385. *They never dream'd the passes could be past.*

DID YOU NOTE THESE DESCRIPTIONS?

Here are several lovely lines of description from *Gareth and Lynette*. Study each to discover why it is effective.

Lines 212-213. *The Lady of the Lake stood: all her dress*
Wept from her sides as water flowing away.
Lines 291-292. *Our one white lie sits like a little ghost*
Here on the threshold of our enterprise.
Line 528. *I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee.*
Lines 535-536. *I spring like flame from ashes.*
Lines 574-577. *A damsel of high lineage, and a brow*
May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom,
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower.
Lines 694-695. *Thralls, to your work again,*
For an your fire be low ye kindle mine!
Lines 794-796. *Gareth loosed the stone*
From off his neck, then in the mere beside
Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere.
Lines 1387-1390. *With dance*
And revel and song, made merry over Death,
As being after all their foolish fears
And horrors only proven a blooming boy.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

1. What picture of Elaine do you get as the story opens?
2. What is the story of the finding of the diamonds? What part does Guinevere play in relation to them? How does the love of Lancelot and Guinevere forewarn us of the downfall of the Round Table?
3. How does Lancelot happen to go to the tournament disguised?
4. Tell of Lancelot's stay at Astolat and his effect upon Elaine. What request of hers serves to confuse matters at the tournament and why does it do so?
5. At the fight, which side does Lancelot choose and why? Why do his relatives fight so bitterly against him? What is the outcome of the tournament?
6. Upon what quest is Gawain when he comes to Astolat? How does his behavior there contrast with what Lancelot's had been? How does Gawain dispose of his quest?
7. How does Guinevere seem to take the rumor that is circulating about the Court with regard to Lancelot? What evidence can you gather of her real feeling?
8. How does Elaine happen to see Lancelot again? What is his "one discourtesy" to her? Its purpose?
9. Give an account of the scene between Lancelot and Guinevere when he gives her the diamonds. What is the dramatic conclusion of it?
10. Describe how Elaine comes to Court, telling how Arthur and his Court reacted to the situation.
11. Under what circumstances does Lancelot express repentance? How sincere do you feel his repentance to be?
12. Compare Elaine's love for Lancelot with that of Guinevere.

ADDING TO YOUR VOCABULARY

Did you know all of these words that you found in *Lancelot and Elaine*? If you didn't, consult the Glossary. Write sentences containing these words:

1. abashed
2. adulation
3. amorous
4. bard
5. bark
6. comely
7. conjecturing
8. dallying
9. devised
10. disparagement
11. dolorous
12. eloquence
13. fantasy
14. feigned
15. girt
16. in lieu
17. lineaments
18. lusty
19. myriad
20. nape
21. obsequies
22. oriel
23. peerless
24. prowess
25. remorseful
26. squire
27. tremulous
28. versatility
29. waxes; wanes
30. wroth

THESE QUOTATIONS ARE WORTH MEMORIZING

Line 123. *Who can gaze upon the sun in heaven?*
Line 132. *He is all fault who hath no fault at all.*
Lines 447-449. *In me there dwells*
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
Of greatness to know well I am not great.
Line 635. *Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it.*
Lines 672-674. *I know not if I know what true love is,*
But if I know, then, if I love not him,
I know there is none other I can love.
Line 713. *Obedience is the courtesy due to kings.*
Line 944. *This is not love, but love's first flash in youth.*
Line 1082. *He makes no friend who never made a foe.*
Lines 1186-1187. *Let rumors be: When did not rumors fly?*
Lines 1205-1206. *Diamonds for me! they had been thrice their worth being your gift.*
Lines 1207-1208. *To loyal hearts the value of all gifts must vary as the giver's.*
Lines 1365-1366. *To doubt her fairness were to want an eye,*
To doubt her pureness were to want a heart.

DID YOU NOTE THESE DESCRIPTIONS?

Here are some of the beautiful descriptive lines that Tennyson uses in *Lancelot and Elaine*. Discover how he uses the

sound of words to help his effect. What else makes these descriptions memorable?

Lines 137-139. *The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream*
When sweetest; and the vermin voices here
May buzz so loud—we scorn them, but they sting.

Line 185. *Known as they are, to me they are unknown.*

Line 463. *Whom he smote, he overthrew.*

Lines 477-485. *They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds, and thus,*
Their plumes driven backward by the wind they made
In moving, all together down upon him
Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North Sea,
Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
Down on a bark, and overbears the bark
And him that helms it; so they overbore
Sir Lancelot and his charger.

Lines 867-872. *Had he seen her first*
She might have made this and that other world
Another world for the sick man; but now
The shackles of an old love straiten'd him,
His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

THE HOLY GRAIL

1. Compare the various visions of the Grail.
Who saw it veiled? To whom was it revealed unveiled? Study the character of each of these persons to determine the reason for the special privilege.
2. What was Arthur's reason for disapproving of the quest? Have you cause to think his judgment was sound?
3. Why do you think the story is told from Percivale's point of view? What is he like?
4. What had Percivale's sister and Galahad in common?

5. What part does the Siege Perilous play in the story? What do you think is meant by the phrase "No man could sit but he would lose himself"?
6. What is the significance of the four zones of sculpture referred to in lines 232-240?
7. What is the significance of the recurrence of Percivale's phrase "And I was left alone, And thirsting in a land of sand and thorns"? Line 376, 389, 420, etc.
8. What is the monk, Ambrosius, like? What artistic purpose does he serve in Tennyson's story?

ADDING TO YOUR VOCABULARY

How many of these words that you have met in *The Holy Grail* were old friends? Write sentences of your own, using these words:

1. *cloisters*
2. *cowl*
3. *fervent*
4. *havoc*
5. *miracle*
6. *pale* * *Line 21*
7. *phantom*
8. *pinnacle*
9. *quagmire*
10. *quest*
11. *scandalous*
12. *scud*
13. *unremorseful*
14. *use* * *L. 110*

* *For these two words be sure that you find the special meaning in which they are used in this idyll.*

THESE LINES ARE WORTH MEMORIZING

Line 136. *God make thee good as thou art beautiful.*
Line 158. *O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine.*
Line 165. *He believed in her belief.*
Line 178. *If I lose myself, I save myself!*
Line 279. *Art thou so bold and hast not seen the Grail?*
Line 313. *But one hath seen, and all the blind will see.*
Lines 319-320. *Ye follow wandering fires*
Lost in the quagmire!
Lines 445-6. *True humility*
The highest virtue, mother of them all.
Line 456. *Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself.*

DID YOU ENJOY THESE DESCRIPTIVE LINES?

Tennyson is a master of descriptive poetry. These lines show how effectively he used the English language to express his ideas. Perhaps there are other lines that appealed to you more. If so, which were they?

Lines 182-8. *And all at once, as there we sat, we heard*
A cracking and a riving of the roofs,
And rending, and a blast, and overhead
Thunder, and in the thunder was a cry.
And in the blast there smote along the hall
A beam of light seven times more clear than day:
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail.

Lines 209-11. *For all her shining hair*
Was smear'd with earth, and either milky arm
Red-rent with hooks of bramble.

Lines 380-2. *And then a brook,*
With one sharp rapid, where the crisping white
Play'd ever back upon the sloping wave.

Line 511. *In silver-shining armor starry-clear*

GUINEVERE

1. How is Guinevere's sin finally disclosed? What do you think of Lancelot's reaction to the discovery? How does Guinevere take it?
2. What action does the king first take as a result of the disclosure? What proof have we of the finer side of Lancelot's character in this situation?
3. How does Modred take advantage of the situation? What previous proof have we had of Modred's character?
4. What makes the scene between Guinevere and the little novice singularly dramatic? Human?
5. Why does Arthur feel Guinevere's sin is so grievous? How does he feel about her? Does he find any hope in the situation?

6. How does Guinevere live the rest of her life? Do you feel this is a satisfactory solution? If not, how would you have the idyll end?
7. Memorize lines 465 through the middle of 474. Study this code of knighthood. What are the essential rules of conduct in it? Is it a good code for today? How would you improve upon it as a code for modern young people?

DID YOU KNOW ALL OF THESE WORDS?

Did you know all of these words to be found in *Guinevere?* If you don't know their meanings, you will find them defined in the Glossary Section at the back of the book. Write sentences of your own, using these words:

1. bane
2. dale
3. faltered
4. garrulously
5. novice
6. penance
7. polluted
8. prate
9. prone
10. repast
11. retinue
12. scathe
13. troth
14. usurped
15. voluptuous
16. wrangle

HERE ARE LINES THAT ARE WORTH MEMORIZING

Lines 113-114. *There will I hide thee till my life shall end,*
There hold thee with my life against the world.

Line 117. *Would God that thou couldst hide me from myself!*

Lines 197-200. *I thank the saints, I am not great;*
For if there ever come a grief to me
I cry my cry in silence, and have done:
None knows it, and my tears have brought me good.

Lines 333-334. *For manners are not idle, but the fruit*
Of loyal nature and of noble mind.

Lines 352-353. *So she, like many another babbler, hurt*
Whom she would soothe, and harmed where she would heal.

Lines 371-373. *For what is true repentance but in thought—*
Not even in inmost thought to think again
The sins that made the past so pleasant to us?

Lines 464-474. *I made them lay their hands in mine and swear*
To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honor his own word as if his God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her.

Lines 474-480. *For indeed I knew*
Of no more subtle master under heaven
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought, and amiable words
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.

DID YOU LIKE THESE DESCRIPTIVE LINES?

There are many beautiful lines in Guinevere. Which did you like best? Did you note these? Explain what you like about each:

Lines 7-8. *The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,*
Clung to the dead earth.

Lines 10-12. *Sir Modred; he that like a subtle beast*
Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne,
Ready to spring, waiting a chance.

Lines 48-52. *But, ever after, the small violence done*
Rankled in him and ruffled all his heart,
As the sharp wind that ruffles all day long
A little bitter pool about a stone
On the bare coast.

Lines 78-82. *Its shadow flew*
Before it till it touch'd her, and she turn'd—
When lo! her own, that broadening from her feet,
And blackening, swallow'd all the land, and in it
Far cities burnt.

Lines 359-363. *When that storm of anger brake*
From Guinevere, aghast the maiden rose,
White as her veil, and stood before the Queen
As tremulously as foam upon the beach
Stands in a wind, ready to break and fly.

Lines 603-607. *"O Arthur!" there her voice brake suddenly,*
Then—as a stream that spouting from a cliff
Fails in mid air, but gathering at the base
Re-makes itself, and flashes down the vale—
Went on in passionate utterance.

Lines 672-674. *Fast with your fasts, not feasting with your feasts;*
Grieve with your griefs, not grieving at your joys,
But not rejoicing.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

1. Into what condition has Arthur's England fallen by the opening of this idyll? What had been the initial cause of this? Who now was leading the forces against Arthur?
2. What knight is Arthur's principal companion throughout this idyll? Why is it fitting that he should be the one?
3. What is the outcome of "this last weird battle in the west"? Why is the victory a sad one?
4. What important task does Arthur give Bedivere and how does he carry it out?
5. What is Bedivere's tale of Arthur's passing? How does this fulfill the early legend about Arthur?

ADDING TO YOUR VOCABULARY

How many of these words that you met in *The Passing of Arthur* were old friends? Write sentences of your own, using these words:

1. *abyss*
2. *brandish*
3. *carol*
4. *chafed*
5. *chancel*
6. *goad*
7. *lamentation*
8. *sacked*
9. *sequel*
10. *swarthy*
11. *verge*
12. *wistfully*

THESE LINES ARE WELL WORTH MEMORIZING

Line 28. *I pass but shall not die.*

Line 210. *A little thing may harm a wounded man.*

Line 246. *This is a shameful thing for men to lie.*

Lines 261-262. *Deep harm to disobey,*
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.

Line 289. *Authority forgets a dying king.*

Lines 408-409. *The old order changeth, yielding place to new,*
And God fulfils himself in many ways.

Lines 415-416. *More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.*

Lines 418-421. *For what are men better than sheep or goats*
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?

DID YOU ENJOY THESE DESCRIPTIVE LINES?

These lines are well known for their beauty. Note the emotional effect Tennyson creates through the use of harsh-sounding words. Why does he do so?

Lines 85-89. *And the long mountains ended in a coast*
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.
There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled no further fly the King.

Lines 108-112. *Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,*
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battle-axes on the shatter'd helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist.

Lines 216-219. *And over them the sea-wind sang*
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

Lines 238-239. *I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,*
And the wild water lapping on the crag.

Lines 344-346. *King Arthur panted hard,*
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute.

Lines 368-371. *An agony*
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

THE KING'S HENCHMAN

ACT I

1. What story was Maccus singing as the play begins?
2. Look up Cynewulf in the history of English literature. What poems did he write and how important was he?
3. What was unusual about Maccus? older
4. Quote the lines in which Eadgar tells of his longing for a wife.
5. Had Eadgar ever seen his intended bride?
6. Tell how Æthelwold once saved Eadgar's life. What kind of man does Æthelwold seem to be?
7. What is Æthelwold's attitude toward women? Has this any merit for his mission?

8. What pledge do Eadgar and Æthelwold drink?
9. At what time of the year does Æthelwold leave?
10. In what part of England is Devon?
11. This play is said to give an accurate picture of the true customs and language of England in the reign of Eadgar. What are the most interesting examples of these customs and language?

VOCABULARY BUILDING

Did you know all these words before you read *The King's Henchman*? What does each mean? Use them in sentences of your own.

trencher	*shire*	*kiln*	*wight*
cassock	*harry*	*doughty*	*henchman*
yokel	*wrack*	*bairn*	*weird*

If you do not know the meanings of the words listed above you will find them defined in the Glossary at the back of this book.

QUOTATIONS WORTH REMEMBERING

(page 222)—*He knoweth not Fear by sight; he hath not seen Her shadow on a wall.*

(page 223)—*Talk of the Evil One, and thou treadest on his tail!*

DID YOU NOTE THESE DESCRIPTIONS?

Miss Millay, like Tennyson, is a gifted writer of description. Read those given below and decide what makes each particularly effective. Notice what short words she uses, and how frequently the initial letter of one is repeated. This is called alliteration. Read in the Introduction why Miss Millay uses alliteration in this poem. Do you recall examples of alliteration from *The Idylls*?

(page 215)—. *Hoarse as the howling*
Winds of the winter, When the lean wolves
Harry the hindmost

(page 232)—*Up, Sun! Stir in thy straw!*
Night yawns, and sighs to give over the watch
to thee!

ACT II

1. On what evening does the action in this Act occur? Does this lend anything to the occasion?
2. What had caused Æthelwold and Maccus to lose their way?
3. Why had Ælfrida and Ase come out into the woods?
4. Why does her conscience trouble Ælfrida about saying Ase's rune?
5. Under what circumstance does Ælfrida first see Æthelwold? What does she think has happened?
6. Pretend you are Maccus. Tell what your reaction is to this situation.
7. Do you think Æthelwold should finally have hardened his heart and resisted?
8. Did Æthelwold make a mistake in sending his message to Eadgar? What might he better have said or done?
9. Find evidence of Maccus' humor and his sense of the irony of the situation.

VOCABULARY BUILDING

Did you know all these words before you read *The King's Henchman?* What does each mean? Use them in sentences of your own. Look up the ones you do not know in the Glossary.

churl	*lissome*	*wanton*	*wan*
bide	*bumbling*	*lief*	*uncouth*
rune	*baleful*	*sough*	*hight*

QUOTATIONS WORTH REMEMBERING

(page 239)—*My heart hath a stone in its shoe.*

(page 240)—*O Darling Sleep, hast thou a word for mine ear?—*
I will not shout thee down.

(page 247)—*My heart hath seen him, too.*

(page 251)—*Of thee the sight or the sound,*
The turn of thy head, thy speaking,
Is like a thing found,
To a man seeking.

(page 251)—*Two children are mine eyes before thy shining wonder.*

(page 252)—*Forget thee—*
Men do not live so long!

(page 259)—*I am an old man;*
For I am gutted of hope.

DID YOU NOTE THESE DESCRIPTIONS?

Note the imaginative comparisons by which Miss Millay heightens the effect she creates. Note again how short are the words she uses, but how vivid the imagery. Do any of these recall any descriptions of Tennyson's? Compare the two.

(page 243)—*What am I doing here*
In the dripping dark,
On the eve of All Hallows?
Ghosts alone
Of men long dead
And weanèd to the dripping dark
Will be abroad tonight;
And tittering elfin things,
To stroke me with their nails!
No lissome, laughing ghost
Of warm and living youth
Will rise from the ground at my spell!

(page 244)—*I wonder, had I done better to sit at home*
And bide by the tidy fire
A tidy fireside love!

(page 247)—*Moon, how thou stridest,*
And whippest up the clouds to foam about thy knees!
Ah, could I make him some way mine,
Ere night like a raven go flapping to another wood!
Some way, some way mine!

(page 255)—*Letting the sun ride by, with his golden helmet,*
And all his flashing spears and his flags outstreaming,—
Ride by, ride by, ride by,
Shaking the ground!

ACT III

1. What has happened since the end of the second Act?
2. How has Æthelwold changed since the first Act?
3. In what way does Ælfrida's character resemble that of her father?
4. Why is Ælfrida dissatisfied at the beginning of the third Act?
5. Did Æthelwold's deception of Eadgar and Ælfrida bring him happiness? Explain.
6. What plans made by Æthelwold for escape were blocked by the arrival of Eadgar?
7. Was Ælfrida really under an obligation to sacrifice herself to protect Æthelwold? Explain and defend your opinion.
8. Compare the advice of Ase to Ælfrida with the advice of Maccus to Æthelwold at the end of the second Act.
9. Find the passage wherein Eadgar indicates that he has lost more than a friend through Æthelwold's betrayal.
10. How does Eadgar's attitude toward Æthelwold change after Æthelwold's death?
11. If you had been in Eadgar's place at the beginning of the Act, what would you have done?
12. Do you feel the conclusion of the story is inevitable? If not, how would you have it end?

VOCABULARY BUILDING

Did you know these words before you read *The King's Henchman*? What does each mean? Use them in sentences of your own. Look up the ones you do not know in the glossary.

beshrew	shingle	welkin
chore	daft	kirtle
addled	swilling	barm-cloth

QUOTATIONS WORTH REMEMBERING

(page 269)—*Thy speech is a thread full of knots.*
And thy deed likewise.

(page 273)—*But I tell thee, a man that cometh to a cross-roads*
Must turn his back upon the one way
To follow the other.

(page 279)—*Oh, to be a fox in a trap!—*
That I might gnaw my foot off and be free!

(page 286)—*Hast thou no bone i' thy back?*
Starch thy mind.
Thou must drop thy silver shell, to pick up the gold one.

(page 290)—*Time flieth, 'tis said; but when I am afar from thee, friend,*
He flieth with a wounded feather.

(page 291)—*For thou hast in thine eyes a shadow that squeezeth my heart.*

(page 295)—*Wretched land, upon what hollow rafters fair to the eye*
May not thy roof rest!

DID YOU NOTE THESE DESCRIPTIONS?

Note Miss Millay's imagination, imagery, unusual comparisons and vivid but simple choice of words. Do any of these descriptions recall to your mind like ones by Tennyson?

(page 268)—*Oh, God!—the wind that blows always!*
Would I could put an arrow in the heart of the wind,
And bring his beating feathers down!
On that day,
On that day when the wind lay dead,
And the sea was smelt and smooth,
A man might think his thought out.

(page 281)—*'Tis the long winter hath addled thy wits!*
Me! Me! That have spent my days like a swallow,
Dipping in and out of a house in the eaves of the earth!
Me, Queen of Britain!

(page 283)—*There, there thou shinest like a sun, filling the room!*
Make haste, and hide thee in a cloud from the King's eyes!

(page 285)—*Thou, thou half-wit!*
Wouldst have the King see thee looking like a bundled untied?

(page 295)—*My mind, that hath been fed so long on the sweet fare of utter trust in thee,*
Smells at this meat,
And turns away.

(page 295)—*For lo, with thy sorrow and mine in the same room*
The world heels over!

Regents Examination Questions

1. Two elements of most poetry are imagination and emotion. By specific references to a play written chiefly in verse or to a long poem studied in high school, prove that the play or poem illustrates these qualities of poetry. Make your answer concise and definite.
2. From some book that you have read during your English course select a character indicated by (1), (2), (3), or (4) below. Write a "pen portrait" of the character selected; that is, describe his or her appearance and explain what manner of person he or she is. For your description you may have to draw on your imagination to a considerable extent; for the explanation you should confine your answer largely to the text in which the character is found. (Give the name of the character and the book from which it is taken.)
 (1) A character who meets a crisis courageously.
 (2) A character who influences people politically or morally.
 (3) A character who dies in loyalty to duty.
 (4) A character who suffers much because of the wrongdoing of others.
3. From the literature studied or read in your English course, select three works and explain briefly how each work selected has enriched the world with ideas inspirational or practical.
4. Write a narrative telling how some character of whom you have read in a play disentangles himself or herself from some dangerous or embarrassing situation. (Give the name of the character and of the play.)
5. If you were asked to spend a week with a character that you have read about in a book, say whom you would choose, giving reasons.
6. Give the exact title and the full name of the author of four poems read during your high school course, and tell briefly the contents of one of these poems.

7. Name four characters from a play or plays read in high school and tell in what play or plays these characters appear. Write a brief sketch of one of these characters.
8. Compare as to character, achievements and interest the heroes of two good plays that you have seen or read.
9. What drama has been of importance in teaching you the value of honesty in yourself and in your relations with others? Explain how the drama did this. If possible, quote appropriately from it and cite both character portrayal and incident in support of your position. (Refer to more than one drama, if you wish.)
10. Serious plays and novels usually deal with some special phase of life: family relations, politics, professions, business, social injustice, moral questions, pioneering, etc. Choose one play that treats of any important phases of life and in a paragraph show in some detail (1) what phase the author deals with and (2) what ideas about it he expresses or what conclusions he reaches. Give the title and author.
11. From the reading of books, we gain many ideas that challenge, help, interest, amuse, or stimulate our thinking in some other way. Referring to at least two pieces of literature, set forth clearly and completely four different ideas with which you have become acquainted through reading.
12. "Adversity is the test of strong men." Show that writers frequently put their strong men or women to such a test.
13. A good play usually produces a number of effects: (1) At the beginning, our sympathies with the desire, emotions, or purposes of the chief character are enlisted; (2) as the story progresses, our strong approval or disapproval of the purposes of this character is evoked; (3) finally, our belief that the conclusion is inevitable is established. Selecting a play, show through specific illustrations cited in proof of your statements that it does the three things mentioned above.

14. In literature, as in life, the reactions of two people toward each other, when devoted to each other and living in close relationship, depend upon complex and conflicting emotions. These people may be father or mother and son or daughter, husband and wife, brother and sister, etc. From works which you have read, select and state, in one or two sentences, the situation that involves two such characters. Then discuss briefly the conflicting emotions that enter in, together with their causes and results. State the author's name as well as the title.

College Entrance Board

1. Poets are said to reveal the truth. What revelation has come to you from your reading of the *Idylls of the King?*
2. Compare the heroic qualities of the characters in the *Odyssey* with the heroic qualities of the characters in Tennyson.
3. Name three qualities which you consider every good narrative poem should possess. Analyze one narrative poem to show that it possesses these qualities.
4. If you wished to stimulate an interest in poetry, which of the poets with whose works you are familiar should you choose for this purpose? Name three of the poems which you think would be especially effective in awakening this interest. Show by a discussion of these poems why you chose them.
5. Discuss, with definite references to narrative poems that you have read, the advantages and disadvantages of telling stories in verse.
6. Show how the proverb "Pride goeth before destruction" is exemplified in the *Idylls of the King*.
7. It has been said that literature helps readers better to understand life. Express your opinion of this statement, using specific illustrations from at least four works that you have read.

8. Literature is communication. What have some poems communicated to you? Illustrate your answer by specific reference to four poems. Give titles and authors.
9. Some of the following elements may be found in poetry: (a) imagination, (b) emotion, (c) ideas, (d) incident. Give titles and authors of several poems that you have enjoyed reading, and explain in the case of each which of the elements listed was the principal cause of your enjoyment.
10. Write about a narrative or a lyric poem, dealing with (a) its meter, (b) its diction, (c) its allusions, and (d) its emotional appeal.
11. (a) Name six different important characters from works that you have read. Give titles and authors.
 (b) Characterize briefly any two of these.
12. Write several paragraphs on the melody of poetry.
13. Write a composition on "We can find poems for almost every mood."
14. Write a composition of about 350 words on "The reading of poetry tends to produce an increased sensitiveness to experience; in other words, poetry makes us more aware of the emotional values of life."
15. Explain what you have learned about the personalities of two authors as these writers have revealed themselves in their works.
16. Tell what you have learned from the *Idylls of the King* about society and manners of other times or of remote regions; make your answer definite by specific references.
17. What human experience forms the basis of each of four poems that you have read? Give the authors and titles of the poems. Explain briefly the merits of each poem that you have chosen.
18. "It is certain that each man of intelligence and fine feelings will make his own demand as to the values of poetry." What are some of the values that you demand in poetry? Illustrate your answer by specific reference to

at least four poems, giving in each case the titles and the authors of your examples.

19. Write a composition of about 350 words on "Poetry is part of the full experience of man."
20. Mention some of the experiences of life which poetry is peculiarly fitted to express. Illustrate your answer by specific references to four poems that you have read.
21. In literature we frequently meet persons who arouse our admiration or our dislike. Choose one person from a novel and another from a full-length play, and show by definite references why you admired one of these persons and disliked the other person. Give titles and authors.
22. A poet or an essayist frequently describes a personal experience involving a place, a person (or persons), an event or a mood. From the poems and essays you have read, choose a total of four selections, and in each case indicate by definite references the nature of the experience and the author's reaction to it. Give titles and authors.
23. The possession of moral or spiritual values helps people to face the problems of living. The lack of such values often leads to unhappiness or tragedy. From the novels, full-length plays and full-length biographies you have read, choose two books, and in each case show by definite references how a person in the book was helped or hindered by the possession or lack of such values. Give titles and authors.

THE GLOSSARY

Glossary

abashed made shy
abide stay; await
abyss deep hole in the earth's surface
addle (addled) muddle (muddled)
adulation flattery
affiance trust
agape with open mouth
agaric any fungus (such as that growing on a dead tree)
aghast horrified
akin related
albeit but; although
amorous loving
an if
annulet ring
anon soon afterward; again
appal frighten
assailed attacked
assay try
athwart across
avail use; advantage
Avanturine brown quartz that sparkles
avoid get away
azure blue

bairn child
baleful distressed; wretched
bane woe; harm
bard poet
bark vessel; ship
barm-cloth apron
baseborn of lowly birth
basilisks mythical dragons
bay aromatic herb used to garnish meat
behest command
beknaved called knave
belike likely; perhaps
beset attacked
beshrew mild expression of disgust
besprent sprinkled
bewray betray
bide (biding) stay (staying)
bier frame or stand on which a dead person or coffin is placed
blazoned inscribed or decorated
blithe gay
bode stayed
boon favor; gift
bracken large fern
brandish wave or flourish
brands swords
breviary prayer book
brewis thickened broth
broach sharp iron rod on which meat can be roasted
brook endure
buck wash
buffet blow
bumbling blundering
burns brooks
burthen refrain of a song
butts casks

caitiff vile
caitiffs rascals
callow inexperienced
carol song
carolling singing
carrion dead or decaying flesh
casque helmet
cassock long, close-fitting garment worn by the clergy
cataract rushing stream; a waterfall
cate delicacy
censer incense-burner
chafed rubbed
chamberlain officer in charge of the private rooms of a noble
chancel enclosed part of a church containing the altar
changeling substituted child

chapman trader
char chore; job
charlock wild mustard
chased engraved
chastens disciplines
chore task
churl peasant; servant
cipher empty and meaningless
cleaved (clave) was true; clung to
clod earth
clomb climbed
cloven cut through
cockatrice fabulous serpent
colewort cabbage
colleaguing uniting
comb valley surrounded by high cliffs
comely beautiful
compass surround
concourse gathering
conjecturing guessing
cope struggle with
corselet breastplate
couchant lying down with head uplifted
counter opposite
cowl a monk's hood
craft cunning
crag a steep, rugged rock
craven cowardly
credulous believing
crescent growing
crupper rear
cuirass upper body armor
cuisses armor for legs
culver wood pigeon
curvet prance
cygnet young swan

daft crazy
daïs raised platform
dale valley
dallying toying
deem believe
devised composed
devisings skill
devoir duty; devotion
disparagement belittling
dole mourning; alms
dolorous sad
doom prophecy; destiny
doughty brave
downs bleak, barren hills
dragon-boughts loops or curves in tails of dragons
drave drove out

eery arousing fear
effeminate soft
eloquence forceful speech
enow enough
ensample example
errant roving

fain gladly; eager
faltered hesitated
fantasy imagination
favor gift from a maiden to her knight and worn by him in battle
fealty loyalty
feigned pretended
felon criminal
fennel herb of the parsley family
fie shame
fillet band or ribbon
fluent flowing
foray raid
forebore forgave; did not take
fostered cared for
frontless shameless

gadding constantly moving
garrulously talking a great deal
gast terrify
giddy dizzy; foolish
girt surrounded by
goad pointed rod used to urge on an animal; to urge on as with a goad

gorse a shrub
gossamer silk from a spider's web
grace favor
grail cup; chalice
greave armor for legs
griffin imaginary creature, half lion and half eagle
guerdon reward
gyve and gag iron muzzle and ducking stool used to punish scolding women

haft handle
haler healthier
haling hauling
halt lame
harried ruined
harry raid; attack; ravage
helm helmet
henchman faithful follower
hern heron, a wading bird
hest command
hight is (am) called
hind peasant; farm hand
hoary white with age
holden held
holpen helped
holt woods
host army
housel sacrament

idolators heathens (worshipers of idols)
immersed plunged
in lieu instead
inveterately firm
isled taken refuge

jacinth hyacinth; a red transparent stone
jousts duels and tournaments fought by knights on horseback

keep dungeon
keystone top stone of an arch
kiln drying oven
kine cows
kirtle a short skirt or gown
knave rascal; servant

lade load
lamentation crying; sorrowing
Lammas feast of the loaves, (Aug. 1)
languid weak with weariness; drooping
lay song
league measure of distance about 3 miles
leech doctor
leman sweetheart
Lent-lily daffodil
lets hinders
lichened covered with moss
lief beloved
liefer rather
liege lord
lightly quickly
lineaments face
linnets songbirds
lissome lithe; active; nimble
looming visible
loon clown
lusty strong
lye-buck wash

mage magician
maimed crippled
mar spoil
marches frontiers
marge shore
marshalled led; arranged in order
mast acorns and nuts for feeding cattle
mavis thrush
mead meadow; a kind of liquor
meet fit; fitting
mere small pond or lake
merle blackbird

mien appearance
minster cathedral
miracle
missay insult
mock imitate
moot assembly
mount mountain; hill
musing thinking; considering
mute silent
myriad countless

nape back of neck
natheless nevertheless
neat-herd cow herdsman
novice a maiden preparing to be a nun

obsequies funeral rites or ceremonies
ordained commanded; ordered
ordinance an order or law
oriel a curved or angular window that projects out from the wall of a house

pagan heathen
palfrey saddle horse
palled covered
pavilions tents
peerless without equal
penance an act to show sorrow or repentance for sin
peradventure perhaps
perforce by force; of necessity
petty little
petulant annoyed; fretful
phantom a dim or ghostly image
pining longing
polluted soiled; poisoned
postern-gate rear gate
potshard piece of an earthen pot
prate to talk idly
prattling talking childish chatter
precipitancy onrush
pretext excuse
prodigious tall; exaggerated
proffered offered
prone outstretched flat
prowess heroism
puissance power
purblind dim-sighted
purport purpose

quest search; mission

rail complain
raiment clothing
ramp rear on hind legs
rapine the seizing and carrying away of things by force
rapt completely occupied
rated scolded
rathe early
ravage harm; lay waste
realm kingdom
reave strip
reavers robbers
redressing righting
reel stagger
refectory dining hall
reft robbed; stole
remorseful repentant, regretful
repast meal
reproof criticism
retinue company of servants
reviler scolder
rick stack (of hay or grain)
riving tearing apart
Rood Cross
rosemary herb used to garnish meat
roundelay song in which a refrain or a line is often repeated
rout crowd
rune (runing) mystic verse (making verses)
russet reddish brown
ruth pity

sacked looted

saga story of heroes
samite heavy, silk cloth
save (saving) except
savor reputation
scathe harm
scaur bare hillside covered with loose stone
scullions pot cleaners
seneschal steward
sennights weeks
sequel result
settle high-backed wooden bench
shingle beach; pebbles
shires counties
shrew small animal like a mole
shrift absolution after confession
shrive confess
simples medical plants
sithen since
slake drink
slander false statements
smite (smote) strike (struck)
sooth truth
sough spar
spate flood or heavy rain storm
spit roasting rod
squire knight's attendant
stanched stopped the bleeding
stead place
stoat ermine; weasel
stole a long narrow band
straitened bound
strand beach
sunder divide
suppliant asking forgiveness
swarthy dark in color
swilling rinsing
swinking working

tarns small mountain lakes or pools
tarriance stay
tethered tied
thane a lord's attendant knight
thrall servant
tinct color
thong thin strip of leather
thorpe small village
timorously timidly
tithe small tax
tranquillity quiet; calmness
travail hardship; suffering
treble triple
trefoil three-leafed clover
tremulous shaking; fearful
trenchant sharp
trenchers wooden plates
troth promise
twain two

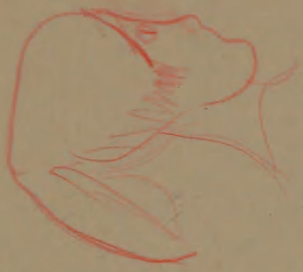
uncouth strange; odd
unquelled unconquered
usurped seized and held by force

vacillating uncertain; changeable
vassals men pledged to service
verge edge
vermin insects that trouble men and animals
versatility many-sided ability
vert green
vexillary standard bearer in a Roman legion
vext troubled
viand food
villain peasant
voluptuous giving pleasure to the senses; luxurious

wanes (waning) fades (growing less)
wan-sallow pale and sickly
wanton unruly; ungovernable
warded guarded
wassail drink a toast
wattles twigs; framework made of twigs
waxes increases; grows greater

weald open country
ween to believe; to think
weird a witch; fate
welkin heaven
wend go
wight creature
wiliest most cunning
wimple veil (woman)
wistfully longingly
wont custom
wormwood bitter medicine
wot knows
wrack destruction
wrangle quarrel
wreak revenge
writhen twisted
wroth angry; enraged
wrought worked into shape
wyvern dragon

yews evergreen shrubs
yokel simple country man
yore past
ywis certainly



NOBLE'S COMPARATIVE CLASSICS



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